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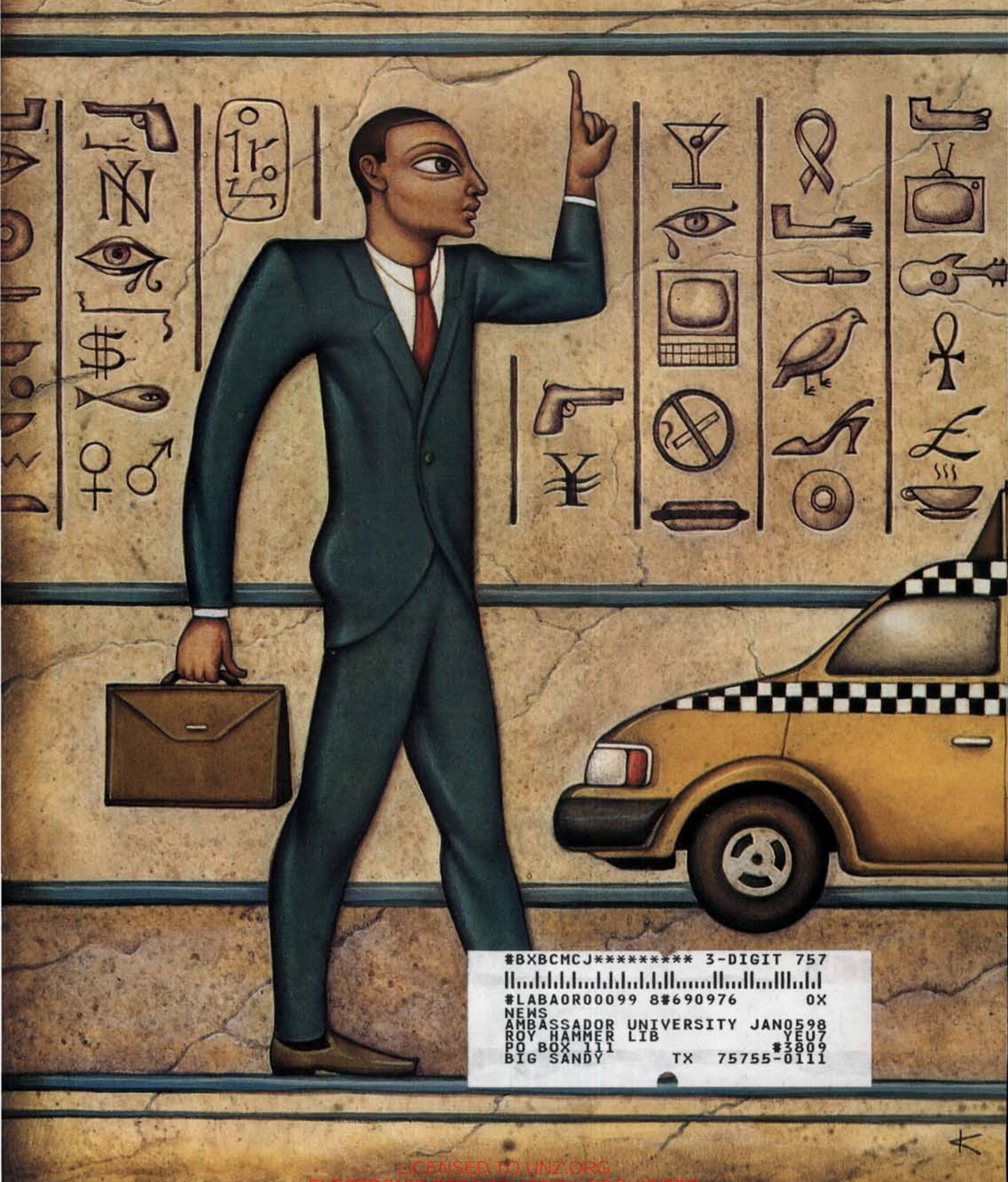

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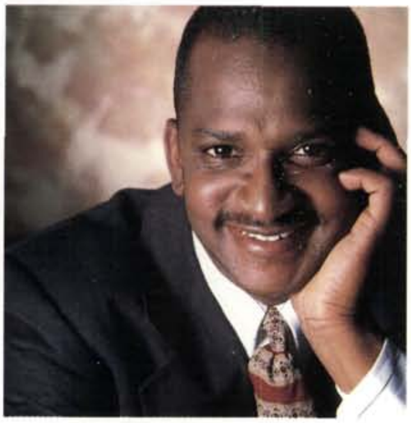

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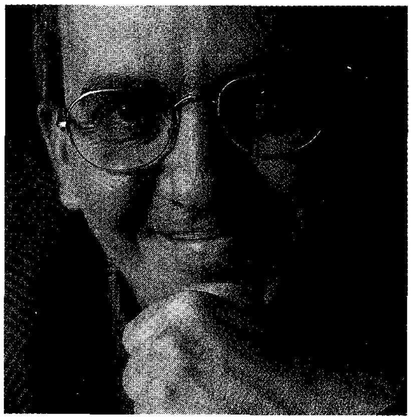

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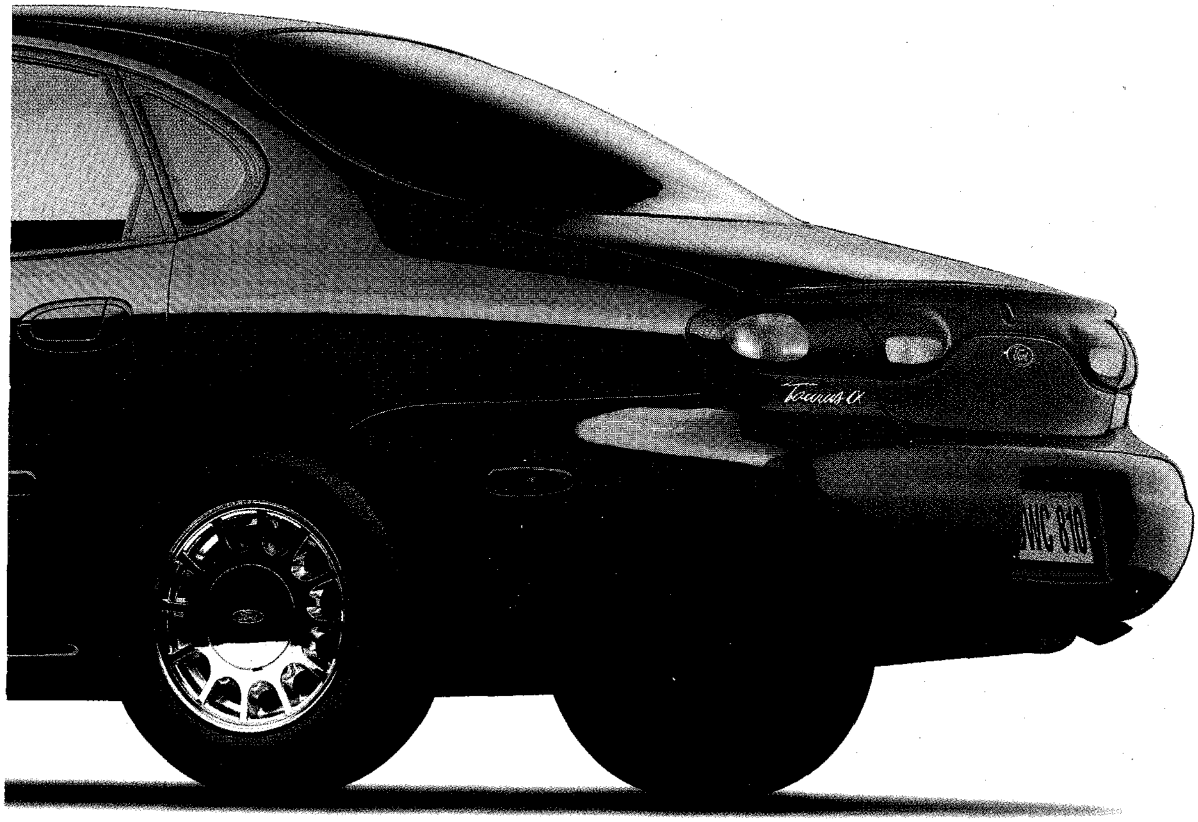

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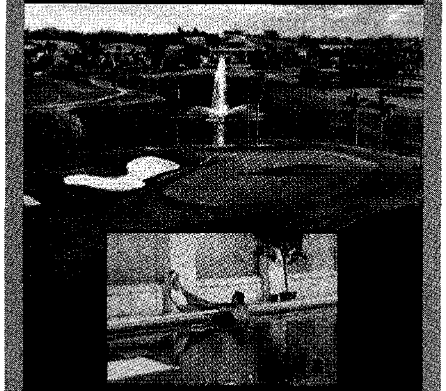

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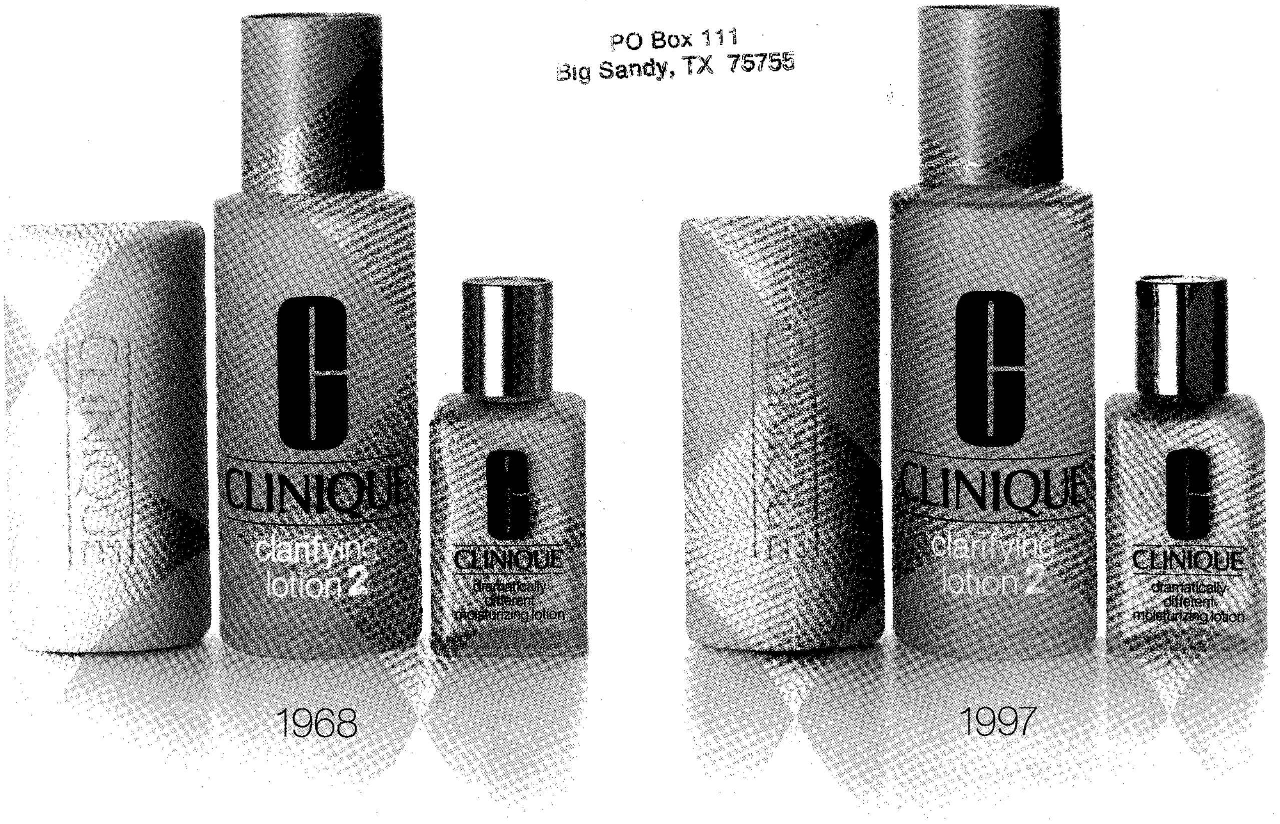
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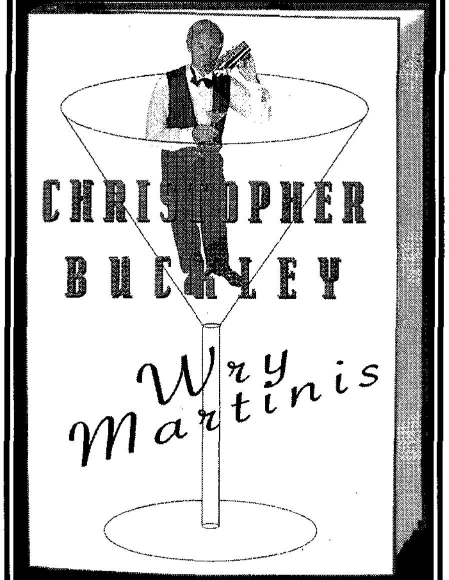

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COMMENT

BROKEN ENGAGEMENT

Will the financial scandals wreck the President's China initiative?

A BEGUILING image was nestled deep in the compost of obituaries, recollections, and ruminations after the death of Deng Xiaoping. It was a picture of Deng at the age of sixteen, jaunty in a dark suit and cap, on his way to Paris in 1920. The Lost Generation revised: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Stein—and Deng Xiaoping? Yes, he was there, although not, as Stein might have have observed, *there.* He was in a work-study program that appears to have been much more the former than the latter. He worked in a steel mill and in an auto plant. He lived on a glass of milk and a croissant a day. He became a soccer fan and a Communist. This was not, perhaps, as significant a moment in Deng's political development as the Long March, or learning that his eldest son had "fallen" from a fourth-story window while in the custody of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, but he did see Paris in the twenties: he knew something of the world. Which is more than can be said of the generation of leaders who succeed him. They came of age at a particularly straitened time, in a China sealed off from the non-Communist world after the revolution of 1949. And so Jiang Zemin, along with Li Peng, Chi Haotian, Zhu Rongji, and the other current leaders, had Moscow in the fifties, not Paris. Most were trained as engineers. They didn't huddle in garrets and dream of revolution; they cut their teeth on turbines. And they are, by most accounts, a remarkably cautious and parochial group of men. They are certainly not very promising interlocutors for an American President who hopes to make history in China.

Relations between the United States and China have almost always been melodramatic and obtuse. The blunders of the past fifty years alone have been staggering—from our support of the corrupt and inept Chiang Kai-shek regime to the disastrous misapprehension that the Vietnam Communists were a Chinese-front operation (and belated recognition of the Sino-Soviet split). Even Richard Nixon's brilliant strategic alliance with China against the Soviet Union was obtained at the price of ignoring the human-rights atrocities of the Cultural Revolution. In the nineteen-eighties, the end of the Cold War brought a confusion of competing explosions—Kentucky Fried Chicken in Tiananmen Square. And ever since, as Morton Abramowitz, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, puts it, "We've had no coherent policy toward China."

Bill Clinton didn't think very hard

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about China during his first term, but he did have big plans for his second. He hoped to elevate relations with China to the same level as those with Russia. There would be regular summit meetings between Clinton and President Jiang Zemin; there would be strong relationships at the Vice-Presidential and ministerial levels. (Al Gore would cultivate a Chinese analogue of his Russian buddy, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.) This policy of "engagement," as it is officially called, would entice the "face"-conscious Chinese into taking a more reasonable attitude: no dramatic breakthroughs, perhaps, but quiet progress on human rights, trade, military issues, and the rest. It seemed, given the zigs and zags of the past, a startlingly modest and sane thing to try.

It was never going to be easy, though, and now it is beginning to seem very difficult indeed. On the Chinese side, there is an almost adolescent collision of pride and terror: pride in the booming economy, terror that the country can't be controlled. The regime has offered to the world a jittery schoolyard version of face: lobbing missiles into the China Sea just before last year's Taiwanese election, and stubbornly insisting on expunging almost every vestige of colonial rule in Hong Kong (including the Brits' belated human-rights statutes).

At the highest levels, meetings between the Clinton Administration and the Chinese have been frustrating. As one person who is knowledgeable about the President's past conversations with Jiang Zemin said, "I don't think they"—the Chinese leaders—"can do very much right now." The President's first one-on-one meeting with Jiang, in Seattle in 1993, was a disaster: Jiang walked in with a prepared speech and delivered every word of it while Clinton fumed. Subsequent meetings between the two men have been more congenial, if not quite productive. Vice-President Gore, for his part, had an awful meeting with Prime Minister Li Peng in Copenhagen in 1995. According to one China specialist, "Li went back and circulated the notes of the meeting to his colleagues in China. The message was: This is how you put the Eagle back in its cage." Later this month, Gore and Li are scheduled to reconvene in Beijing for a meeting that will address "sustainable" environmental development, which, given Chinese ecological depredations, could be memorable.

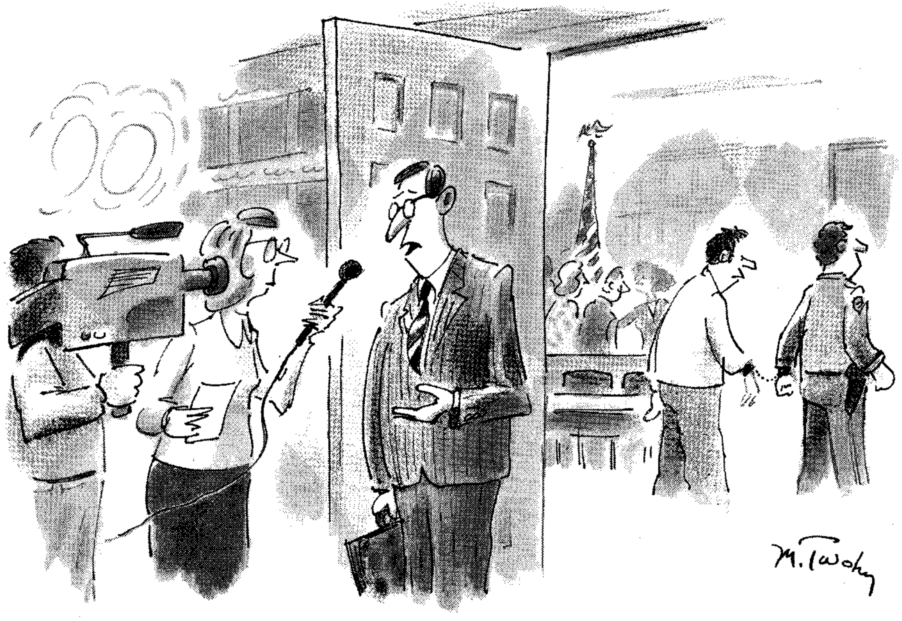
The intransigence of the Chinese leaders was to be expected; that's what our gradual, subtle engagement diplomacy is supposed to alleviate. But there is now a serious obstacle on the American side as well: the Clinton campaign-finance scandal, especially its Asian aspects. The China "connection" appears ubiquitous, if inchoate. All sorts of competing ethnic Chinese seem to have been eager to throw money at Bill Clinton: Taiwanese, Mainlanders, diasporan business dynasts, and plain old Asian-American hustlers. The Washington *Post* has reported that some of this activity may have been coördinated by the Chinese Embassy in Washington; presumably, the Taiwanese had an operation of their own. There seems to be fairly substantial evidence that the alleged hustlers in the middle—people like John Huang, Johnny Chung, and Charles Yah Lin Trie—were engaged in money laundering. But to what end? To establish their *guanxi* (connections) and make money for themselves or to influence American policy?

They probably *have* influenced American policy, but not as they intended. If anything, the Clinton Administration, which had unprecedented opportunities in Asia, will have to be more cautious now. It will be much harder for Clinton to engage China. The Vice-President will go to Beijing, but he won't seek a close, Chernomyrdin-like partnership. "That was scrapped because of domestic political considerations," an aide said.

Bill Clinton faces fewer "domestic political considerations" these days than Al Gore does, and he appears intent on pushing ahead as planned. But the campaign-finance revelations—the implication that the Chinese may have attempted to buy closer ties—have given new energy to human-rights advocates on the left and anti-Communists on the right; recent issues of the neoliberal *New Republic* and the neoconservative *Weekly Standard* have strutted the notion of "getting tough" with China. This may prove a popular gambit for many members of Congress as well, but most China specialists consider the idea untenable. "You can't 'contain' China, because most Asians don't want any part of that," Abramowitz says. He might have added that most Europeans don't seem particularly concerned about Chinese misbehavior, either. "The real choice," he concludes, "is engagement or nothing."

Nothing is not unthinkable. It represents business as usual, mutual mystification—a Sino-American tradition of long standing. It is a tradition that will become more dangerous, however, as the Chinese grow more powerful. It rewards parochialism, on both sides. One suspects that it is not what Deng Xiaoping was searching for when he went to Paris in 1920—and it is certainly not the legacy that Bill Clinton was angling for when he began his desperate effort to raise money for his reëlection campaign.

—JOE KLEIN



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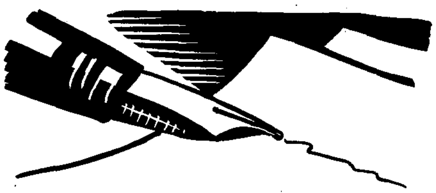

THEATRE ROW

I was surprised to read in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,'s "The Chitlin Circuit" (February 3rd) of August Wilson's separatist prescriptions for black theatre. When my sisters and I saw Wilson's "The Piano Lesson," we agreed that, with a change of names and colloquialisms, it could be performed as an Irish or Yiddish or Polish play, too. The pain and rage and tenderness and absurdity that Wilson conveys are felt by people everywhere. Perhaps he has not understood the universality of his own art.

SHEILA T. DOWD
Berkeley, Calif.

Mr. Gates doesn't mention that the two disparate worlds of black theatre—one driven by intellectual challenges and appreciated by an élite minority, and the other a series of derivative, formulaic melodramas that enjoy enormous commercial success—are entirely analogous to the economic and creative realities of the mostly white theatre. Ambitious playwrights of all colors struggle to have their work produced even for small audiences, while recycled musicals play to packed houses for years. The situation suggests that blacks and whites have much more in common than August Wilson would have us believe.

JON REINER
New York City

The parallels between the black theatre described by Mr. Gates and the wildly popular *shund* (literally, "trash") plays of the Yiddish theatre of a century ago are extraordinary. In "World of Our Fathers" Irving Howe wrote, "As long as both high and low brows accepted the simple division between *shund* and *literatur*—the first disreputable but vivid, and the second honorable but certain to lose money—Yiddish theatre was trapped." *Shund*, like the Chitlin Circuit, provided a vital source of popular entertainment, but it faded away after a generation or two, having injected Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, and Arthur Miller into the mainstream.

MAXWELL E. SIEGEL
Wantage, N.J.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., notes that black audiences' "intensity of . . . engagement is palpable." Last summer, I acted in a short play based on immigrants' oral histories that was performed at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. One afternoon, our audience consisted largely of retired African-American women. Without disturbing the flow of the play, these women continually gave us—four white actors—sighs and murmurs of sympathy and understanding. We actors gave our best performance of the summer. Wherever black theatre may be taken by its authors, producers, directors, and actors, it will be able to build upon this tradition of participation, which is an asset beyond price.

DAVID L. GREENWOOD
Jersey City, N.J.

PHOTO FINISHES

I would like to comment on the statement in "Toy Stories" (Showcase, January 20th) that the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, was "apparently burned by the controversy that flared during its Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano shows," and thus rejected an exhibit of David Levinthal's blackface icons. While past controversy has been instructive, it has in no way influenced our artistic-consideration process. In our thirty-four years of existence, we have always organized exhibitions of substantive work by important artists, regardless of any perceived—or misperceived—notions of controversy.

In the course of reviewing the artist's blackface works, we felt that they lacked the transformative nature of his previous photographs and would benefit by being exhibited in the context of those earlier works. We did not organize such a survey exhibition because the International Center of Photography had already planned to do so during the same time period.

PATRICK T. MURPHY
Director, Institute of Contemporary Art
Philadelphia, Pa.

EDITORS' NOTE: The painting of John Lennon that ran in our February 3rd issue was based on a photograph taken by Harry Benson in Chicago in August of 1966 and published in his book "The Beatles: In the Beginning."

Letters should be as brief as possible, and sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They may be edited for length and clarity.

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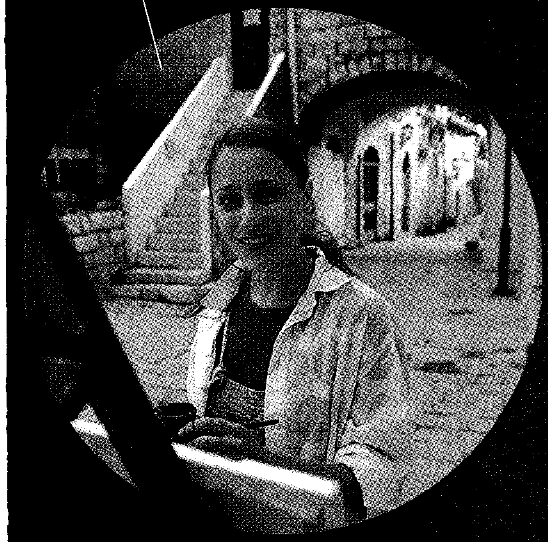

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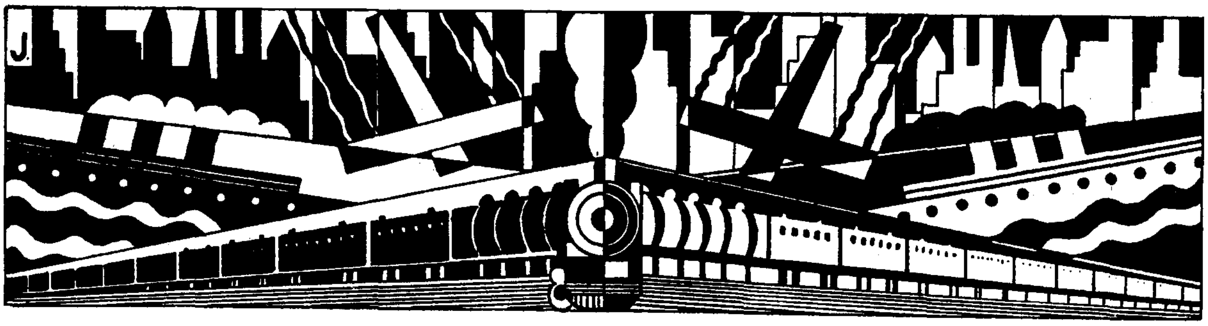

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Antony and Cleopatra—Vanessa Redgrave is the director of this New York Shakespeare Festival staging, in which she co-stars with David Harewood. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Fassbinder in the Frying Pan—A double bill of plays by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, performed aboard the Frying Pan, a salvaged lightship. Opens March 10 at 7:30. (Pier 63, 23rd St. at the West Side Highway. 340-8032.)

God's Heart—Joe Mantello is the director of a new play by Craig Lucas, about the connected lives of six city dwellers. Previews begin March 6. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Green Heart—Charles Busch (book) and Rusty Magee (music and lyrics) have joined forces on this comic thriller, a musical adaptation of Jack Ritchie's short story about a broke playboy with dark designs on a rich botanist. In previews. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Hedwig & the Angry Inch—John Cameron Mitchell wrote and has the title role in this piece about a German Cold War bride turned rock singer; the band Cheater provides the music. In previews through March 8. Opens March 9 at 8. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

How I Learned to Drive—A young woman (Mary-Louise Parker) growing up in the sixties and seventies gets behind-the-wheel lessons in life from her uncle (David Morse), in Paula Vogel's new play. Mark Brokaw is the director. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874.)

Minor Demons—A big-time lawyer who returns to his small home town clashes with childhood friends when he is hired to defend a sixteen-year-old murder suspect. In previews. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

Names—Mark Kemble's drama, set in 1952, about Group Theatre members under attack by the House Un-American Activities Committee. In previews. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

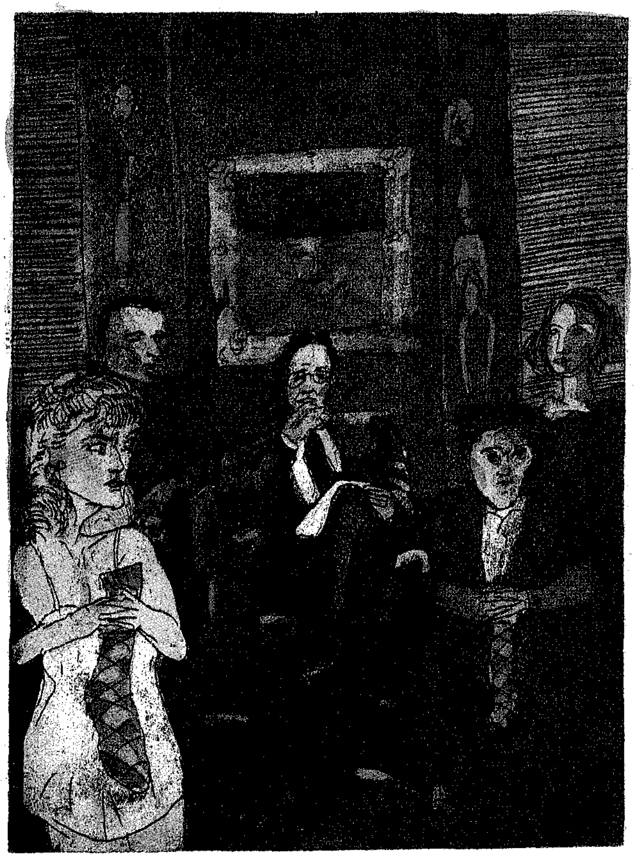
Not Waving . . .—Kyra Sedgwick stars as a woman recovering from mental illness, in a drama by Gen LeRoy. Opens March 5 at 8 and continues through March 23. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

One Flea Spare—Dianne Wiest is in the cast of Naomi Wallace's play, set during London's great plague, in 1665. In previews through March 8. Opens March 9 at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Play On!—A female songwriter leaves the South for Harlem, in a musical the playwright Cheryl L. West based on Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night." Directed by Sheldon Epps, with choreography by Mercedes Ellington; the songs are by Duke Ellington. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

Tap Dogs—Australia's work-booted tap troupe brings its North American tour to New York. In previews. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

Violet—A musical based on Doris Betts's story "The Ugliest Pilgrim," about a scarred woman's journey to seek the help of a TV faith healer. Music by Jeanine Tesori; book and lyrics by Brian Crawley. Directed by Susan H. Schulman. In previews through March 10. Opens March 11 at 7. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)



John Patrick Shanley's sex comedy, "Psychopathia Sexualis."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

OPENED RECENTLY

The Beekeeper's Daughter—In Karen Malpede's latest drama, a poet's quiet island retreat is disrupted by a visit from his social-activist daughter. (Theatre Row Theatre, 424 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

The Changeling—Theatre for a New Audience's production of Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's Jacobean tragedy. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

Chicago—Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the 1975 Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed this time around by Ann Reinking, who co-stars with Bebe Neuwirth) is about a woman who gets away with murder. This razzle-dazzle concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Don Juan Comes Back from the War—The Willow Cabin Theatre Company presents Ödön von Horváth's 1936 play, directed by Edward Berkeley. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 886-1889. Closes March 23.)

Dreamstuff—A retelling of the Aladdin tale as an uneasy mix of high camp and earnest sweetness. The Aladdin seems to be performing in a different musical than the cross-dressing camel and the villain with the diabolical laugh. Still, the cast is talented, and Carol Woods's powerful voice and Louise DuArt's dead-on impersonations make you wish they'd had better material to work with than Sal Lombarde's music and lyrics and John Pantozzi's book. Mr. Pantozzi's direction is as clichéd as his lines. (Samuel Beckett, 412 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. Closes March 30.)

Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!—Gerard Alessandrini cuts a satirical swath through the Great White Way in the latest edition of his musical parody. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

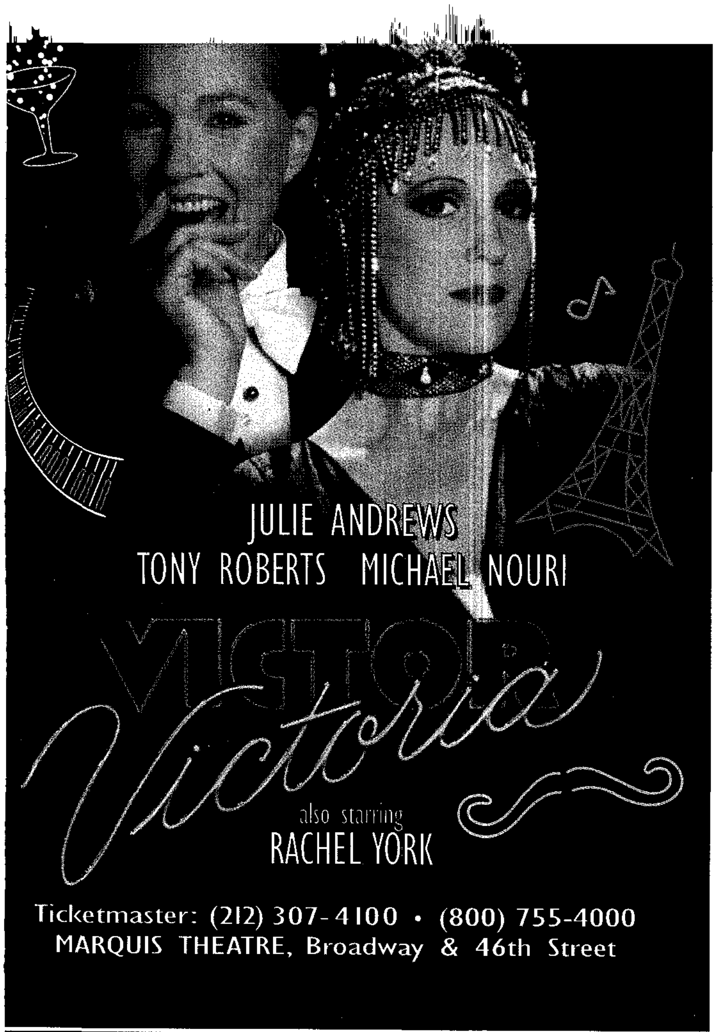
Full Gallop—The legendary, vividly eccentric fashion editor Diana Vreeland is the subject of Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton's one-woman play, in which Wilson stars. Set in 1971, shortly after Vreeland was fired from *Vogue*, it's rich and resonant—very funny and very moving. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Good as New—Laura Esterman portrays a post-facelift wife and Jennifer Dundas and John Spencer her daughter and husband, in a drama by Peter Hedges. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes March 16.)

A Huey P. Newton Story—Roger Guenveur Smith's solo portrait of the co-founder of the Black Panthers. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes March 16.)

In-Betweens—A prostitute, a transvestite, and a couple of ex-cons make up the cast of characters in a darkly comic love story by Bryan Goluboff, set in the Bronx. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 989-2020.)

Joseph Gabriel: Magic on Broadway—Mr. Gabriel has performed at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton for the past ten years, and his feats are certainly impressive, but it's all too



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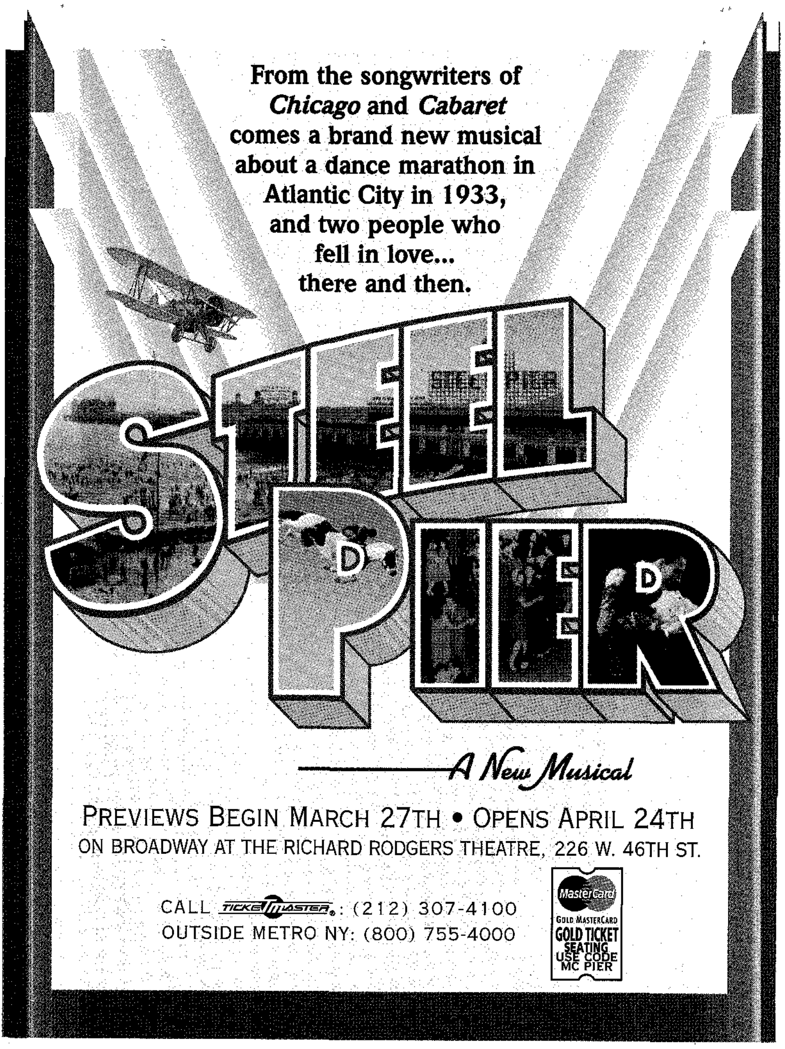

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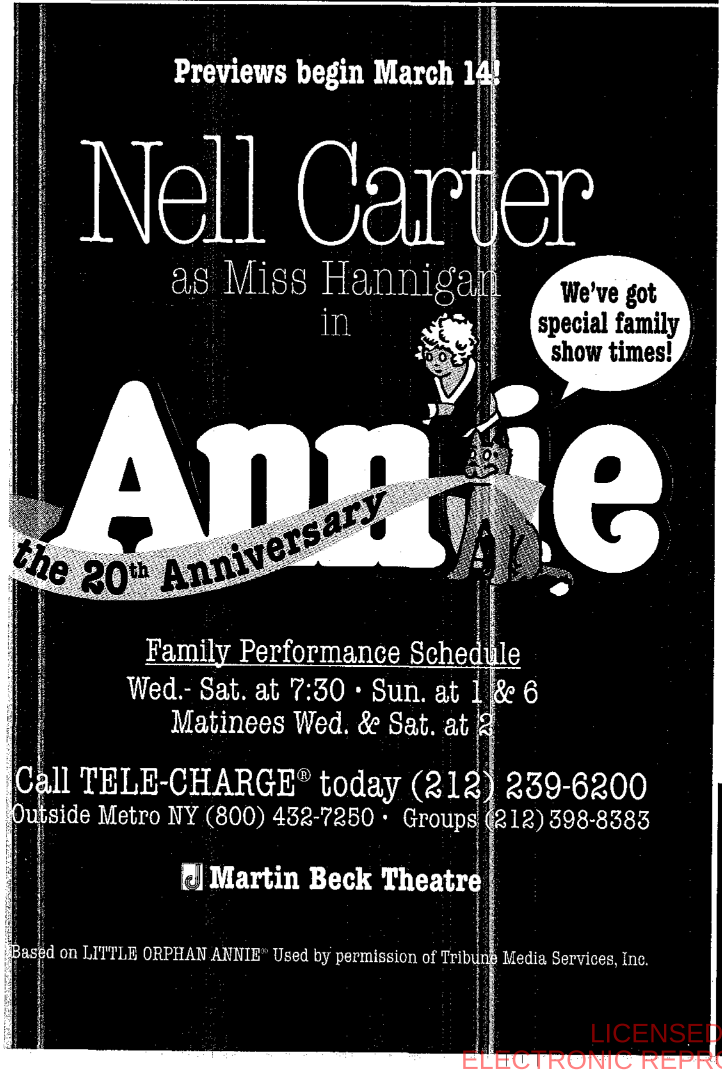

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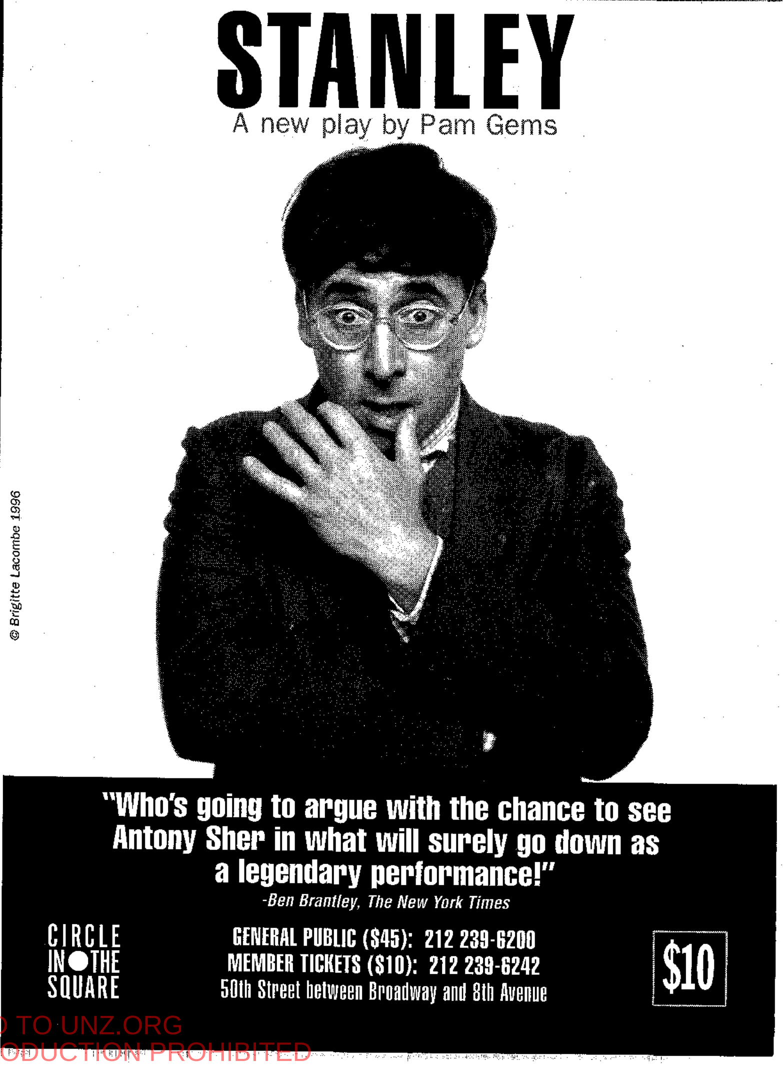

STANLEY
A new play by Pam Gems

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-Ben Brantley, The New York Times

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clear from the trappings of his act—dancers in polka-dotted boxer shorts, a sequinned Elvis—that he hasn't left Nevada behind. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Kerouac—A jazz musical about the Beat author, by Reena Heenan. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-8528.)

The Last Night of Ballyhoo—Alfred Uhry teams up again with Dana Ivey (who starred in the original production of his "Driving Miss Daisy") and Ron Lagomarsino (who directed it) to bring this romantic comedy to Broadway. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

Late Nite Catechism—Maripat Donovan offers a commandingly funny performance as the lone nun in charge of an adult catechism class. (St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

The Little Frieda Mysteries—The Talent Family (the brother-and-sister writing team of David and Amy Sedaris) returns to La Mama with a new comedy, starring Ms. Sedaris, David Rakoff, Penny Boyer, and Chuck Coggins. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes March 15.)

Minutes from the Blue Route—In Tom Donaghy's wistful, funny play, set in the suburbs during a Labor Day weekend, the attempts of a troubled nuclear family to connect threaten a meltdown. Under the direction of David Warren, the actors do a terrific job with the indirect language that their characters have developed for speaking to one another. As mother and father (Elizabeth Franz and Stephen Mendillo) and son and daughter (Matt McGrath and Catherine Kellner) talk and talk and talk—and listen only to what they can stand to hear—Donaghy makes it sadly clear how useless speech can be as a means of communication. Derek McLane designed the evocative set. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes March 15.)

Michael McElroy, Lauren Ward, and Michael Park, in "Violet."

ELIZA GRAN

My Astonishing Self—Donal Donnelly impersonates George Bernard Shaw, in a one-man show by Michael Voysey. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes March 16.)

Old Wicked Songs—Jon Marans' well-written piece of sentimental sanctimony asks the question: Can a blocked, arrogant twenty-five-year-old pianist (Justin Kirk) find wisdom under the tutelage of a suicidal singing teacher (Hal Robinson) who survived the Holocaust? (The answer is yes.) (9/16/96) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313. Closes March 9.)

Once Upon a Mattress—That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess in Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's silly, marshmallowy 1959 musical, based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea," but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Permanent Brain Damage—Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre's latest attempt to stop making sense is jarringly assaultive rather than jarringly provocative, but it will knock some of the dust off your brain. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650. Closes March 9.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Psychopathia Sexualis—John Patrick Shanley's new comedy, about a man with a fetish, stars Daniel Gerroll. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

A Question of Mercy—A 1991 essay on doctor-assisted suicide published in the *Times Magazine* inspired this work by David Rabe. Douglas Hughes directs; Veanne Cox and Stephen Spinella are in the cast. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

Scapin—Bill Irwin's production (he has the title role, he directed, and, with the playwright Mark O'Donnell, he adapted the script) of Molière's comedy is a perfect blend of sweetness and anarchy. Some of the casting is questionable, but Christopher Evan Welch is sensational: game, rubbery, and hilarious, and every bit Irwin's clownish equal. (1/27/97) (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes March 23.)

Signature Theatre Company—The company continues its Sam Shepard season with three one-acts: the brilliant "Pecos Bill," a twenty-minute musical about the Wild West legend and his short-lived wife, which suggests the distance between the Western myth and the reality; "Killer's Head," a fifteen-minute monologue delivered blindfolded from an electric chair, which has the power to make you contemplate the meaning of murder; and "Action," an overwhelmingly claustrophobic tale about finding one's identity, which becomes hard to take. All three were thoughtfully directed by Darrell Larson. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes March 23.)

Stanley—From London's Royal National Theatre comes Pam Gems's play about the English painter Stanley Spencer. Directed by John Caird. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

Stonewall Jackson's House—Jonathan Reynolds's comedy, about a woman who pushes the racial envelope, hits all its targets—from multiculturalism to the misuses of history—with deadly aim, and the versatile cast is hilarious. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes April 27.)

Three Sisters—Amy Irving, Lili Taylor, and Jeanne Tripplehorn are Chekhov's despairing, hopeful trio, in a Roundabout Theatre staging directed by Scott Elliott. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Three Sisters—East Coast Artists' take, directed by Richard Schechner. (La Mama Annex, 66 E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes March 9.)

Tokyo Shock Boys—A troupe of Japanese vaudevillians who specialize in a brand of humor that involves ingesting, inhaling, and generally messing around with unlikely substances, objects, and animals. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

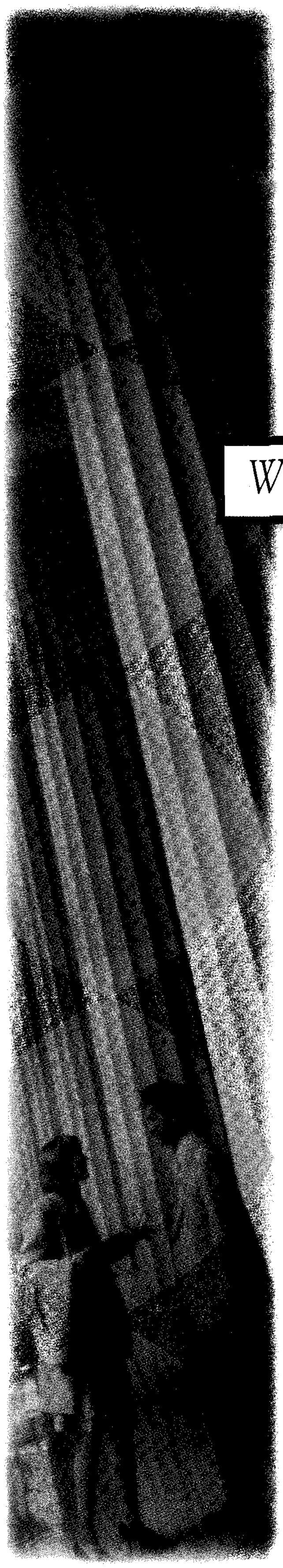
The Two Gentlemen of Verona—Productions of Shakespeare's early comedy don't tend to come around as often as they have this season; this one, a rollicking affair that the Blue Light Theatre Company has set in Texas in 1876, is worth seeing despite the Southern accents and the surfeit of shtick. Greg Naughton makes a compelling Proteus, the gentleman who betrays and is forgiven by his friend Valentine (Talmadge Lowe). The cast also includes Vivienne Benesch, Joe Grifasi, Molly Regan, Matthew Saldivar, Camilia Sanes, and a shepherd-lab mix named Fred, who conveys the nuances of his role as Crab the dog with remarkably expressive eyebrows. Dylan Baker directed. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes March 16.)

What Party?—A New York débutante and her beau navigate the sea of affluence, in a farce by Jennifer Farber. (Gold Room, 74 Varick St., between Canal and Grand Sts. 334-9594. Closes March 16.)

WordFire Festival—The Watermark Theatre's annual solo-performance shindig continues through March 16, with Linda Mancini, Craig Allen Edwards, Myriam Cyr, David Cale, Dael Orlandersmith, Barbara Pitts, Aviva Jane Carlin, Anita Liberty, and Lenora Champagne. (Vineyard's 26th St. Theatre, 309 E. 26th St. For information, call 966-9290.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. (Closes March 23.) . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.



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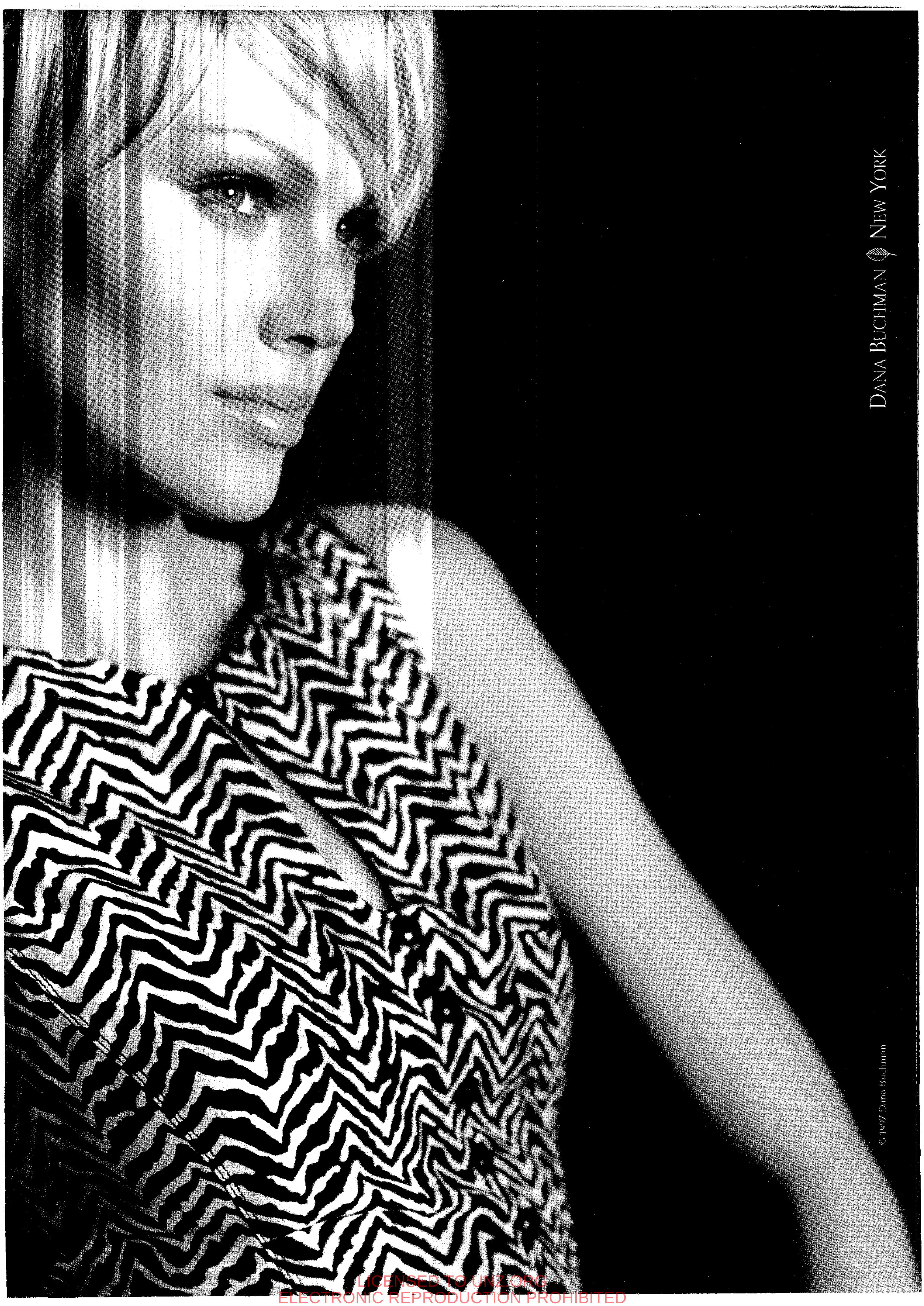
DANA BUCHMAN NEW YORK

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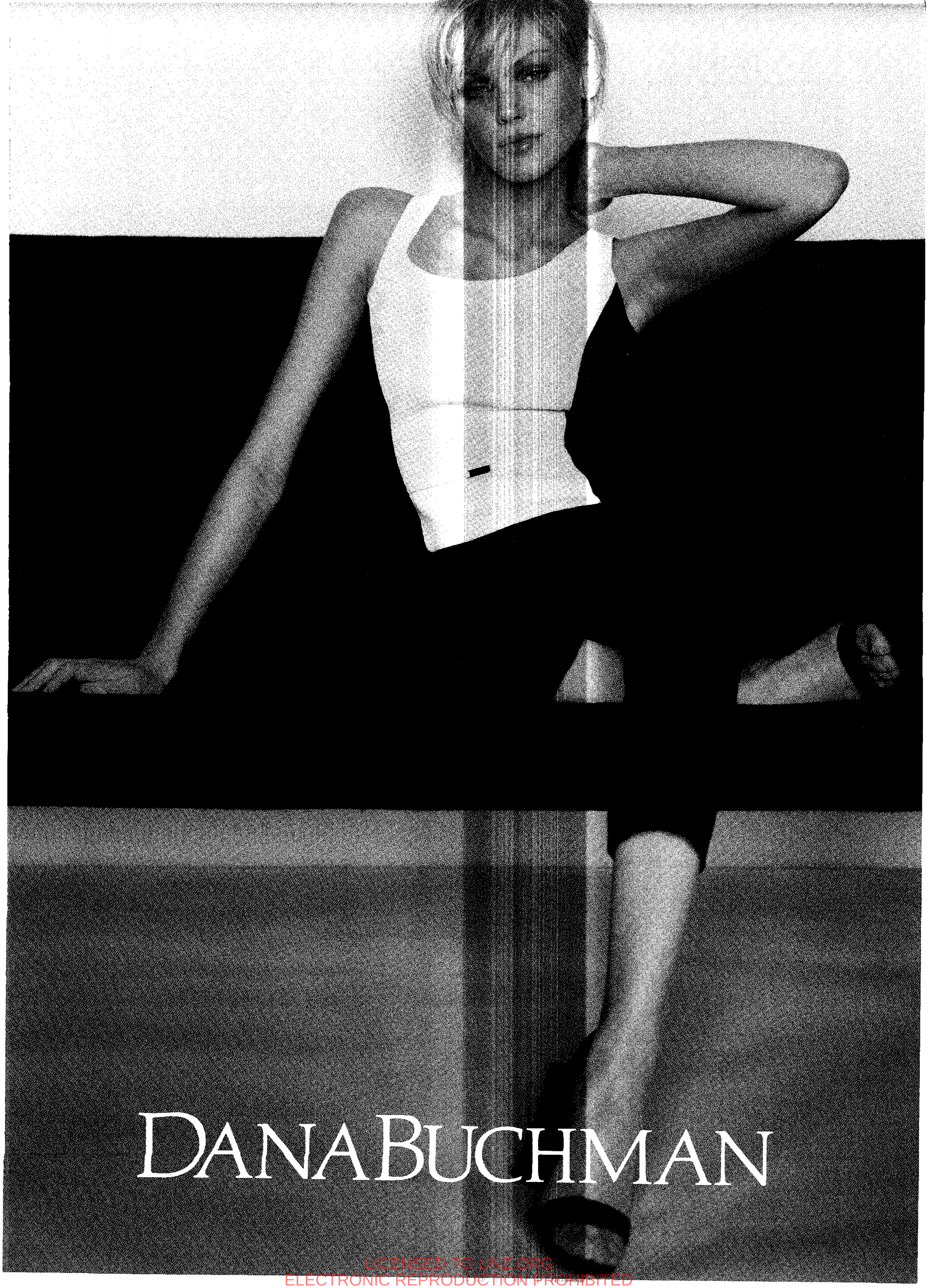

DANA BUCHMAN

DANCE

Paul Taylor Dance Company—Performing a repertoire of ten works, including a première ("Eventide," a beautiful, melancholy ode set to Ralph Vaughan Williams); a new piece first seen in India ("Prime Numbers," with a commissioned score by David Israel); and three significant revivals: "Polaris" (1976), with décor by Alex Katz and a score by Donald York; "Dust" (1977), with décor by Gene Moore and music by Poulenc; and "Brandenburgs" (1988), designed by Santo Loquasto. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. March 4-7 at 8, March 8 at 2 and 8, and March 9 at 3 and 7:30.)

Ballet Tech—For twenty years, Eliot Feld has been auditioning local third and fourth graders for his dance school, and this season, for the first time, his professional troupe consists solely of Ballet Tech grads. In a nod to this homegrown talent, Feld has renamed the company; for the next six weeks it performs in six repertory works, three revivals, and eight premières. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 4-8 and March 11 at 8, and March 9 at 4. Through April 13.)

"Rapid Eye Movements"—Art Bridgman and Myrna Packer assembled a Manhattan Project of choreographers—Ann Carlson, Mark Dendy, Dan Hurlin, Bill T. Jones, Marta Renzi, and Vicki Schick—and asked them to create sections of their ongoing dream dance. The duo, with the help of seven non-sequitur-friendly dancers, perform the six contributions. (Danspace, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 6-9 at 8:30.)

Dances Patrelle—The choreographer Francis Patrelle and his company of moonlighting pros present new work by Alan Hineline, Miriam Mahdaviani, and Patrelle himself. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. March 6 at 7:30, March 7 at 2—a family matinée—and 8, and March 8 at 8.)

"Carnival"—Dance Theatre Workshop's midwinter performance festival continues. March 4 and March 7 at 8: Wally Cardona and his company dance "Monster Suite," set to a Walter Quintus score of scream-movie soundtracks. With "Blood Variations." . . . ¶ March 5 and March 8 at 8: Susan Braham and Dancers perform "A Lantern to Light the Way" and "That's the Situation, Changeless in the Heart of Change." . . . ¶ March 6 at 8 and March 9 at 3: Tim Hadel performs with his two sons, Spencer and Ryan, who are two and five years old, respectively. The Hadels continue through March 15. (219 W. 19th St. 691-6500.)

Martha at Mother—The monthly night-club performance series, hosted by Martha Graham soundalike Richard Move, turns creepy, with Charles Atlas's fifty-minute video "Superhoney," a sort of Danish gothic picaresque with soft-core choreography; Celeste Hastings's "Amazonas," which the director describes as jungle Butoh; and Johanna Constantine's "Asphyxiophiliac Alive!" (432 W. 14th St., at Washington St. 366-5680. March 5 at 9.)

"Girls and Volcanoes"—Sarah East Johnson and her muscular troupe avail themselves of trapezes and mini trampolines to dramatize plate tectonics (ash explosions, lava flows, orogeny). (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. March 6-9 at 8.)

"Carried by the Wind"—Swiss choreographer Estelle Eichenberger pays tribute to Austrian downhill skier Ulrike Maier, who died racing on the slopes at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in the Bavarian Alps. The corps for this blend of dance, acrobatics, and freestyle skiing includes a Winter Olympian, an alpenhornist, and a didgeridoo player. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510. March 6-8 at 8 and March 9 at 3.)

"Cutting Edge"—New works and repertory from choreographer Jamel Gaines and his dance company, Creative Outlet. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 307-7171. March 7-8 at 8 and March 9 at 3.)

Lisa Dalton and Austin Hartel, at the most recent session of the monthly series Martha at Mother.

JOSEF ASTOR

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Mandy Patinkin—Back on Broadway, in a set of benefit concerts. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6280. March 5, March 7-8, and March 11, all at 8, and March 9 at 3.)

"An Evening of Brazilian Jazz"—Few sounds can beat American jazz or the lilting music of Brazil for melodic beauty, yet the combination can be deadly: bossa-nova rhythms and lush harmonies tend to bring out the sentimentalist in jazz players. But in the right hands (like those of Stan Getz), the two come together like rice and beans. For its part, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Orchestra is tough enough to ward off any encroaching mush, and its musical director, Jon Faddis, is just the right drill sergeant to keep it on its toes. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 6 at 8.)

"Jazz of the Sixties: *Discovery, Evolution and Revolution*"—Guess what? Jazz—like everything else except surfing the Web—was better in the sixties. Celebrating that heady time when extending tradition was more important than venerating it are Andrew Hill (still one of the thorniest of modern pianists), Ron Carter (who may have been the busiest bassist of the decade), guitarist Kenny Burrell, and the intrepid arranger, historian, and trumpeter Don Sickler. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 7 at 8.)

"Battle Royale: Piano Trios"—If any instrument has been nourished by the jazz renaissance of recent years, it's the piano. Five of the more skillful keyboard players currently gracing the scene—Eric Reed, Benny Green, Stephen Scott, Renee Rosnes, and Danilo Perez—display their prodigious talents and then square off for some pianistic pugilism. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 7-8 at 8.)

Roberta Flack—Although she has one of the most beautiful voices of her generation, with perfect diction and phrasing and a direct and heartfelt approach, in the seventies her predilection for schmalz easy-listened her into a corner. Still, "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song" are part of musical history, and she just might surprise us. (Whitman Hall, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. March 8 at 8.)

The Chieftains—A Long Island warmup for their now traditional St. Patrick's Day show at Carnegie Hall. (Westbury Music Fair. 516-334-0800. March 8 at 8.)

Huun-Huur-Tu—Tuva, a small republic in the southern Siberian fold above Mongolia, was once known principally for its exotic postage stamps. Now it's gaining broader recognition through this quartet of musical ambassadors, who practice the art of *khöömei*, or throat singing. *Khöömei* masters sing in three basic styles, each of which involves the production of two to four tones simultaneously. Huun-Huur-Tu's concert promises a number of other delights as well, including songs from their new disk, "If I'd Been Born an Eagle," which is more venturesome melodically than their past recordings. (Town Hall. March 8 at 8.)

Metallica—A razor-sharp post-metal force of nature. With Corrosion of Conformity. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. March 10-11 at 7.)

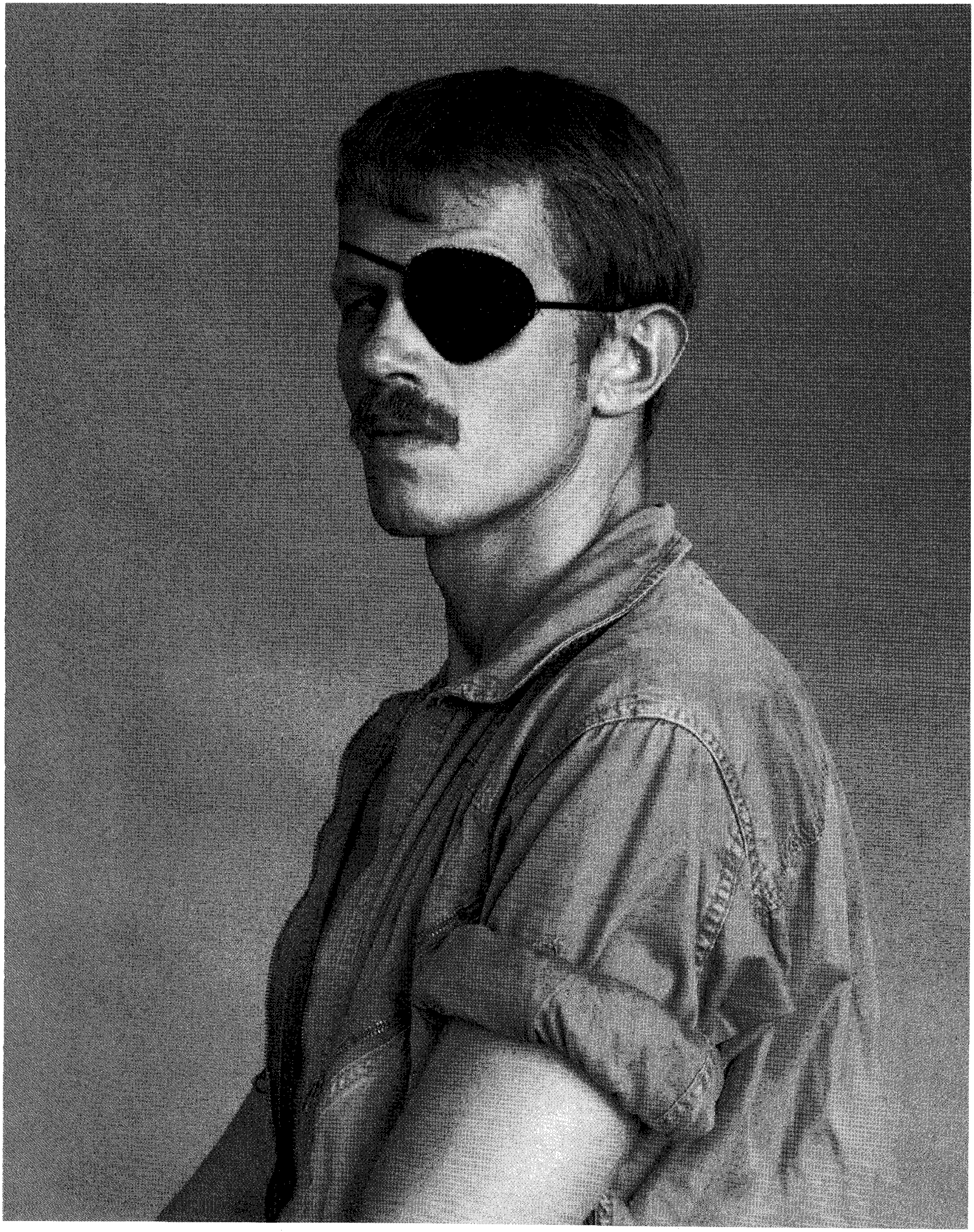
The Allman Brothers Band—The first of ten evenings with the boys from Macon. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. March 11 at 7. Through March 23.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—March 5: **THIRD EYE BLIND**, a four-piece rock band from San Francisco, is one of Elektra Records' great hopes for the future, and there's no way it can live up to its advance publicity. Still, these guys are above average, they have a boy-toy singer in the manner of Eddie Vedder, and they deserve to be seen before the pressure of succeeding destroys them. With the excellent **LAZLO BANE**, which, in the great tradition of Jethro Tull, is a band, not a guy. Already big in England, **CATATONIA** (March 11) plays Garbage-flavored pop.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. March 7-8: **SON SEALS**. One of the leading figures of post-sixties blues, this son of an Arkansas juke-joint operator plays in the slashing, urgent style of his mentor, Albert King. Such aptly named classics as "Chicago Fire" (1980) helped seal his reputation, and live he still smolders.



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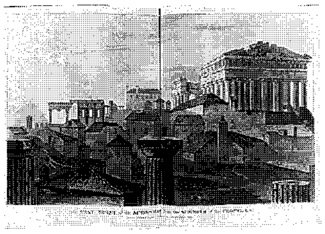

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The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—A lavender and stainless-steel dungeon deep in the heart of the meat district. March 7: Guitar-driven, noirish instrumental music from the New York trio **LAZY BOY. BIS** hops over from the Mercury Lounge on March 11.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—This sprawling two-floor establishment has been all things to all people: meeting hall, rock club, jazz club, Off Broadway theatre. March 6: **LOCAL H,** who make a big sound with just a guitarist and a drummer. With **FAILURE.** March 7: **LAIBACH,** those ironic techno-gloom veterans from Slovenia. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 5: The jaggedly ironic grad-school hip-hop of **SOUL COUGHING** is now so popular that it has given birth to a generation of bands like Cake, which are bringing Beat poetry to the suburbs of America. With **FIREWATER. ANDY SUMMERS** (March 6-9), former guitarist of the Police, performs with a trio. Starting March 11: His knack for jangly pop melodies rescues **ROBYN HITCHCOCK** from what would otherwise be willful quirkiness.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—March 7: **LAZLO BANE** takes the Path from Brownies.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 8: The **LOW 'N SWEET ORCHESTRA.** March 9: **BIS,** a new power-pop band from Scotland. March 11: **JONATHAN RICHMAN.**

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—March 5: One-hit wonder **DONNA LEWIS,** who conquered the charts this year with the redundantly titled "I Love You Always Forever." March 11: **BLUR.** Don't tell Oasis, but this waggish foursome may well be the most celebrated band in England since the Smiths. Its newest release, "Blur," tightens the grip on the British imagination which the band first achieved in 1994, when "Parklife"—a gleefully satiric collection that captured just about every mood in the history of British rock—unexpectedly broke through, making chameleonlike songwriter Damon Albarn the object of the kind of praise that was once reserved for Ray Davies and Pete Townshend.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—March 5: A rocking double bill with **SHUDDER TO THINK** and **CHAVEZ.** March 8: Ten years ago, **CAMEO** gave us "Word Up," possibly the most inspired piece of funk candy since Rick James's "Super Freak." It's been a freaky ride since then for Larry Blackmon and his famous codpiece, but just because Cameo is no longer a commercial force don't think they can't propel your pelvis. With the **FUNKMOB 420,** featuring members of Parliament Funkadelic.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—March 9: Pere Ubu front man **DAVID THOMAS.**

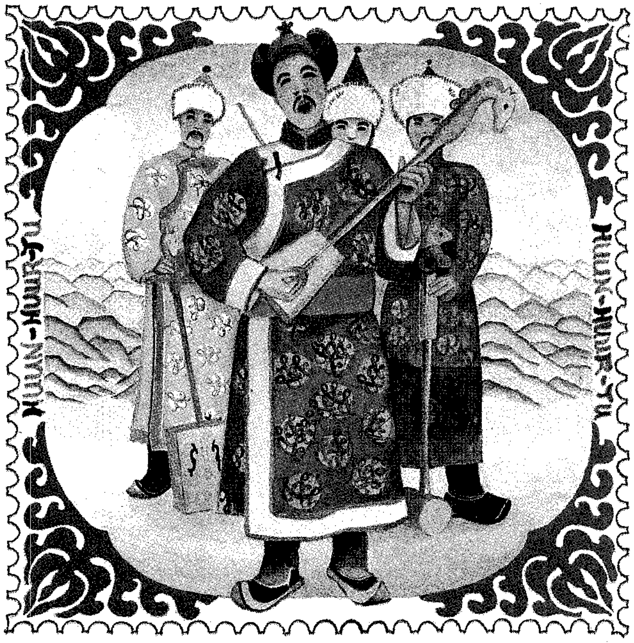
JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—**JULIE WILSON** is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—You simply surrender yourself to **JAMES WILLIAMS** (March 5-6), letting his sweeping keyboard excursions, soulful left-hand foundations, and classic bebop lines wash over you like summer rain. His increasingly seasoned band, Intensive Care Unit, is becoming a welcome presence, too. March 7-9: The **COUNT BASIE BAND,** with its unison smeared trumpet lines, float-like-a-butterfly-sting-like-a-bee rhythms, and blues-based repertoire, will surely keep the sounds of classic big-band jazz with us well into the next century. March 10: The **TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI** jazz orchestra. Drummer **CHARLIE PERSIP** (March 11), one of the unsung journeymen of the sixties, did terrific work with everyone from Eric Dolphy to Dizzy Gillespie. With his experience and knowledge to guide it, his band, Supersound, can let down its hair and roar. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Sure, the ECM recordings they've done together can get a bit sleepy, but **JOHN ABERCROMBIE** and **RALPH TOWNER** are undeniably terrific guitarists whose infrequent duets bring out the lyrical charm in both of them. Towner in particular loses his icy glaze when he hits the stage. A double feature with the **MARC COPLAND** quintet. From March 11: The **PHIL WOODS SAX MACHINE** and the **RON CARTER** string ensemble. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—**JOHN SCOFIELD** (March 4-9) knows how to write a great melody and how to assemble a band. He favors tricky, asymmetrical lines over generic flash. Where his peers tend to be marathon runners, he's an ambler. The key to his appeal is simple: within this cultivated guitarist beats the heart of a twisted bluesman. Starting March 11: **GINGER BAKER'S DENVER JAZZ** quartet.



Huun-Huur-Tu, at Town Hall.

VIRGINIA HATLEY

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 11: Squirreled away in Boston, saxophonist **CHARLIE KOLHASE** doesn't bring his expertise and mirth to our town nearly as often as he should. Joining him on this excursion is the exciting new drummer Matt Wilson.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. In through March 22: Norma Desmond understudy **KAREN MASON.** In the club's Sunday series, singer **ANN DUQUESNAY** presents a tribute to Billie Holiday (March 9). . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Sean Mahony and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming play-

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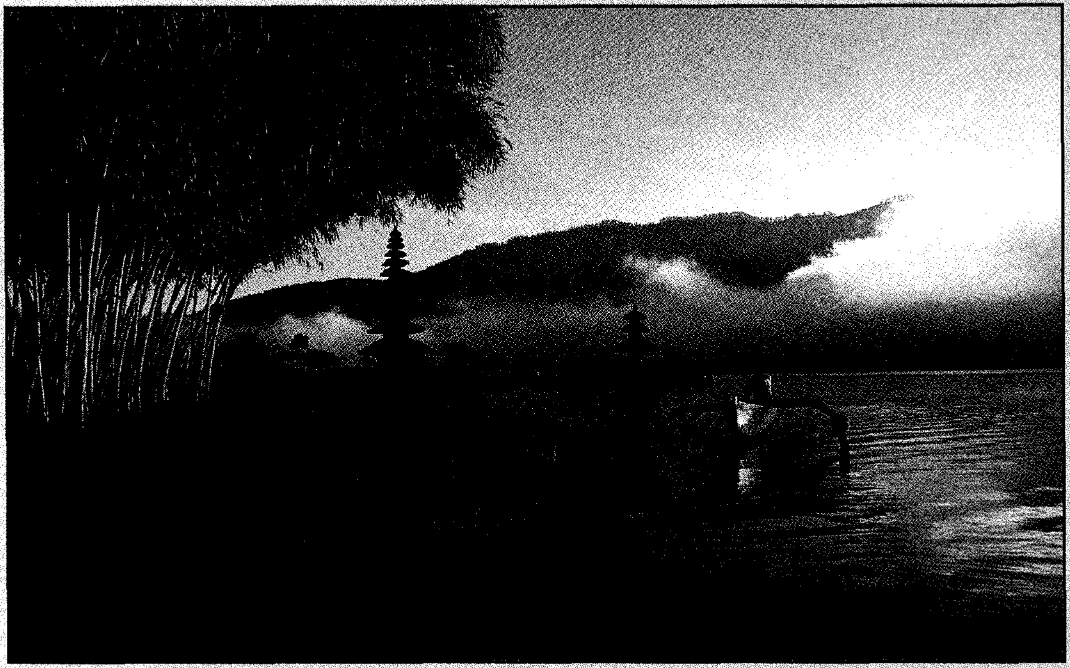

There is really nothing quite like Bali. Tucked away in the Indonesia archipelago, this tropical island is the ultimate respite from the modern world. Lush gardens and azure waters, mile after mile of sun-drenched beaches, remote villages with their ancient customs—these are only a few of the things that might inspire you to visit. Here, by chance, is another: With the purchase of two excursion fare tickets on Garuda Indonesia, we will include a five night stay at the Gazebo Cottages in Sanur Beach, one of Bali's oldest resort villages. We'll also provide transportation to and from the airport, and a sightseeing tour. It's a gift, of sorts. Like Bali itself. For reservations, call your travel agent or 1-800-247-8380.

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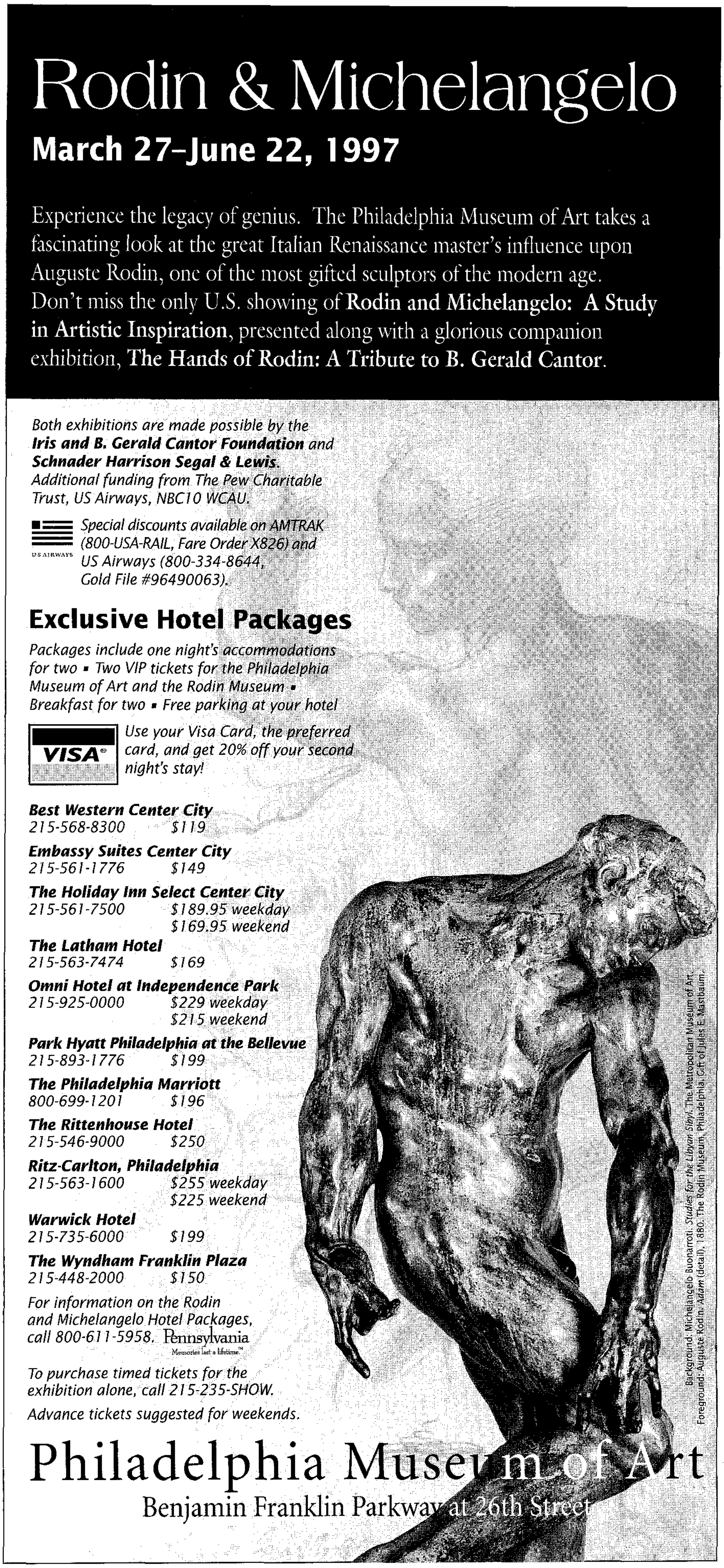

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Background: Michelangelo Buonarroti. *Studies for the Libyan Sibyl*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Foreground: Auguste Rodin. *Adam* (detail), 1880. The Rodin Museum, Philadelphia. Gift of Jules E. Mastbaum.

Philadelphia Museum of Art
Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street

ers jamming late into the night. March 5-6: The **MYRON WALDEN** quartet. March 7-8: The **JONNY KING** quartet. Joshua Redman isn't the only Ivy Leaguer on the bandstands these days; Yale Law grad King plays smart jazz piano, drawing on Bill Evans for lyrical inspiration and sorting his way through a host of contemporary models as he firms up his own increasingly authoritative voice.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—If you've haunted New York's jazz clubs at any time over the past quarter-century, you've most likely heard saxophonist **ALEX FOSTER** (March 4-9), a prized sideman who deserves his own chance to shine. Starting March 11: The **BILLY HART** group. Dining.

TABLES FOR TWO

AGROTIKON, 322 E. 14th St. (473-2602)—Thanks to coffee shops, nobody in New York uses Greek food to play culinary one-upmanship. Greek is gyros. Greek is damp, salty feta cheese on the salad. The pinnacle of Greek is a dip combo. But Agrotikon is helping to change all that. Beneath an ill-marked awning on an ugly block, in a minimalist dining room with some pictures of fruit and outlines of Corinthian columns daubed on the walls, Kostas Tsingas and his crew are composing Aegean odes in vegetables and fish.

Everybody who's been to Agrotikon is subject to its siren call and doomed to return. You may hope to work through all twenty-four small dishes, twenty-one big ones, four salads, and five sides, but it's a Sisyphean task. You can't leave out that homemade lamb sausage in its red-wine sauce, or those walnut-and-goat-cheese dolmas, or the refreshing dandelion-fennel-and-orange salad. The waiters lure you easily into the land of the specials, reciting long delicious-sounding lists with slightly sadistic pride; they know that extraordinary combinations like swordfish layered with beets, celery root, puréed fava beans, taramasalata, and *skordalia* (garlic dip) can't be left untried.

Forkfuls fly across tables as diners exchange bites of a comforting "Greek fisherman pie," topped with a kind of brandade, or a perfect rack of lamb, marinated in a charming typographical error—"red red wine"—and grilled. Chicken is boned and rolled unpredictably around feta, pine nuts, and capers; the baked baby goat is so tender you don't need teeth. Unfortunately for your bursting buttons, there's also dessert, like *galaktoboureko*, a vanilla-cranberry custard in a thin phyllo coat. But you can always come back for that. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $11-$17.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The world's most famous jazz club is also the last place in town that still looks, smells, and feels like a classic jazz club—subterranean, smoky, and thick with the spirits of past masters. March 4-9 and March 11: The **TOMMY FLANAGAN** trio. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

ZINNO, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A purring trio of precision-tuned players—pianist **PETE MALIVERNI**, bassist **DENNIS IRWIN**, and drummer **LEROY WILLIAMS**—holds court through March 8. Symmetry and eloquence are guaranteed. From March 10: **RUFUS REID** (bass), **AKIRA TANA** (drums), and **JOHN STETCH** (piano). Dining.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Giambattista Tiepolo." This ravishing assembly—more than sixty works, mostly paintings—strongly suggests that the eighteenth-century Venetian master, a pivot between the baroque and the rococo, is due for a fin-de-siècle reëvaluation. (He has been not so much dismissed as sidelined by modernist sensibilities mistrustful of his bravura decorative theatricality.) He was something like the Lubitsch of his day, but an element of frivolity does not preclude greatness. "Hagar and Ishmael," "Time Uncovering Truth," and the "Triumph of Zephyr and Flora" demonstrate his lightness of touch in three very different ways; his self-portrait as "Apelles Painting Campaspe," for all its charm, is in no way trivial. Surely no other painter leavened highly dramatic compositions with more wit and inventiveness. Through April 27. . . . ¶ The Costume Institute's much heralded "Christian Dior" blockbuster displays more than eighty opulent items from the decade beginning in 1947, when the designer first presented his influential New Look. Through March 23. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

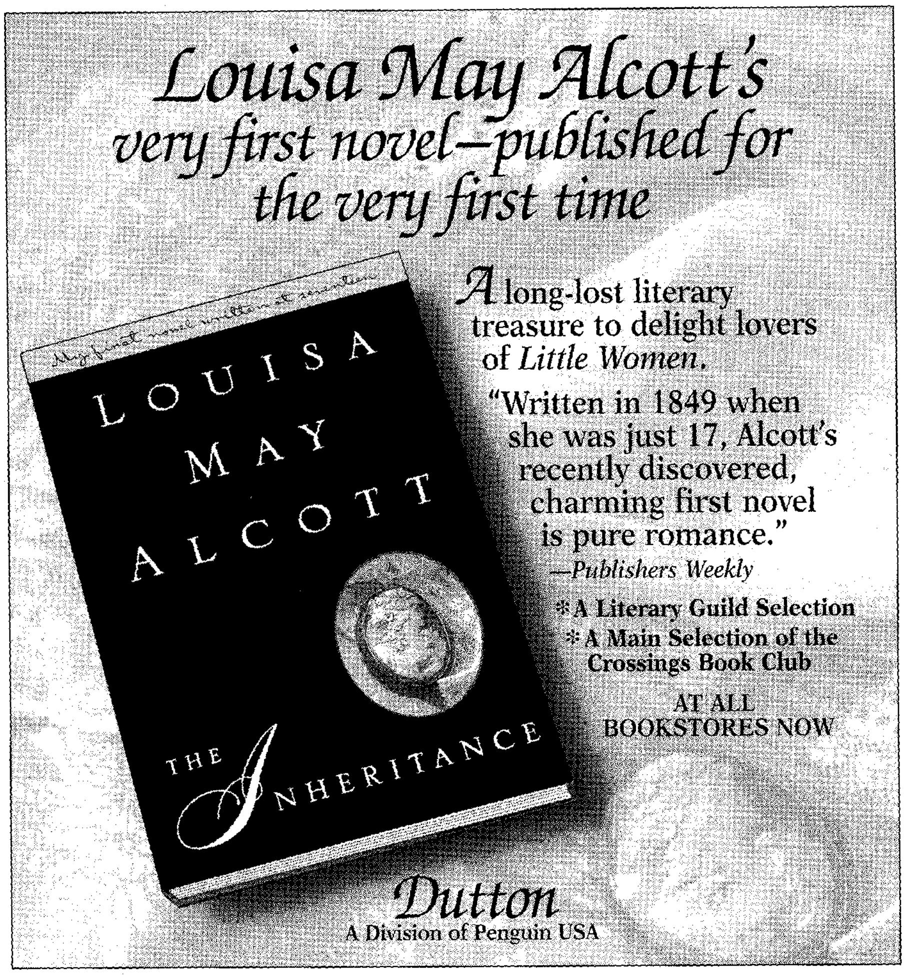
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s." Forty examples from the Abstract Expressionist's final working decade. Through April 29. (For more de Kooning, see Galleries—Uptown.) . . . ¶ "The Maximal Sixties: Pop, Op, and Figuration." Iconic work by Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Polke, Fahlström, Samaras, and other Aquarian artists. Through April 29. . . . ¶ "Manuel Alvarez Bravo," a retrospective of the Mexican photographer's career (see Photography). (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)— "A Century of Sculpture: The Nasher Collection" features work by Brancusi, Giacometti, Matisse, Smith, and other twentieth-century artists. Through June. . . . ¶ "Rrose Is a Rrose Is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography." The exhibition's curator, Jennifer Blessing, has assembled eighty photographic portraits and multipart montages by twenty-four artists whose work engages the fashionable topic of the construction of gender identity. But the quality and intelligence of her choices and their juxtapositions make this show anything but a retread of familiar material. Through April 27. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM SOHO, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"Bill Viola: Fire, Water, Breath." Two ambitious, large-scale works of both formal and intellectual daring by one of our preëminent video artists. Using sophisticated technical effects and often startling audio elements, Viola manipulates video in ways that can be overwhelming and even off-putting, but the demands he makes on his viewers are well rewarded. Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"The Hanged One," a complicated and rewarding film-and-video installation by Charles Atlas, which includes performances by the late Leigh Bowery and the Dancenoise performance artist Lucy Sexton. In a number of wall and freestanding monitors placed, with great precision, around the gallery space, we see (and hear) an elegy on the dissolution of the human body in death and the wit it takes to confront the inevitable. Through March 9. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"Endangered! Exploring a World at Risk," an exhibition devoted to vanishing and extinct species, includes a diorama of an Everglades gator hole, a VW bug covered with zebra



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mussels, animal *objets* (cobra boots, baleen corsets, a rhino-foot ashtray), and a few representatives—a Madagascar radiated tortoise, baby alligators, cichlids—from the Bronx Zoo's Species Survival Plan. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Rediscovering James Brooks: W.P.A. Murals and Other Figural Works" features studies for "Flight," the artist's history of aviation from Daedalus to Pan Am. Through May 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

American Craft Museum, 40 W. 53rd St. (956-3535)—"Beatrice Wood: A Centennial Tribute" celebrates Wood's second career, as a ceramist. The San Francisco native, who turned a hundred and four earlier this month, was part of the New York Dada circle in the teens, exhibiting her paintings alongside those of Duchamp, Man Ray, and Picabia. A few of her works from that era may be seen here, but this exhibition concentrates on the iridescent gold- and copper-glazed vessels that have been her signature since she took up the craft, at forty, in 1933. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 8; Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

China Institute, 125 E. 65th St. (744-8181)—"Adornment and Eternity: Status and Rank in Chinese Ornament" presents twenty-five centuries' worth of jade belts, gold and silver hairpins, jasper earrings, lotus-shaped buttons, and other items used in rituals, burials, and daily life. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday evenings until 8; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—"Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's 'D'Est,' " a film and video installation chronicling the artist's trip through reunified Germany and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Through May 27. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Museum for African Art, 593 Broadway, at Houston St. (966-1313)—"Art That Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia" and "To Cure and Protect: Sickness and Health in African Art," related exhibitions that include parchment healing scrolls, talismanic paintings by clerics of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, masks, amulets, and divination tools from Zaire, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, and other sub-Saharan countries. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5:30; Saturdays, noon to 8; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (534-1672)—"New York Toy Stories" is a thoroughly delightful collection of some three hundred playthings, both homemade and commercially produced, from the past two centuries. Allow plenty of time, even if you're not taking kids. Through April 27. . . . ¶ "The Streets and Beyond: New York Photographs" gathers cityscapes and street-life candids of the turn-of-the-century Lower East Side, twenties traffic, the 1939 World's Fair, fifties rooftop views, and more. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (369-4880)—"Theodore Clement Steele." The masterly modernist (1847-1926) studied in Munich and worked mostly in his native Indiana; he greatly admired Monet, whose influence is evident in many of these forty-eight serene works. Through March 9. . . . ¶ An exhibition of more than fifty works by the Hudson River School painter Louis Rémy Mignot. Through May 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5, and Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

"The Daydream (El Ensueño)" (1931), by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, at MOMA (see Photography).

National Museum of the American Indian, 1 Bowling Green (668-6624)—"Agayuliyararput (Our Way of Making Prayer): The Living Tradition of Yup'ik Masks," an exhibition of elaborate masks from southwestern Alaska. The majority were collected in the late nineteenth century; the current show, which opened in Toksook Bay and Bethel, Alaska, was created in consultation with those Yup'ik communities. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. (873-3400)—"The Birds of America," a hundred and fifty watercolors by John James Audubon, the illegitimate son of a French sea captain and a chambermaid, who came to these shores to avoid a Napoleonic conscription. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—"Let There Be Light: William Tyndale and the Making of the English Bible" assembles artifacts—including both known copies of his 1526 edition of the New Testament—that chronicle the life and surprising demise of this translator, who was burned at the stake as a heretic for his efforts. Gottesman Exhibition Hall; through May 17. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Duncan Grant (1885-1978)—A wide-ranging exhibition of paintings and designs by one of the Bloomsbury group's leading artists; his work is more notable for its charm and verve than for any major accomplishments. There are some fine finished sketches, including one of the critic Desmond MacCarthy, and one important work, a large, psychologically penetrating portrait of Vanessa Bell. But the most engaging objects are miniatures: some spanking-fresh designs (for a fan, a rug, a hat buckle); a brisk, cheerful watercolor for the book jacket of cousin Julia Strachey's novel "Cheerful Weather for the Wedding"; a needlepoint bellpull, flawlessly executed by Grant's mother. Through March 15. (Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. 838-0333.)

Howard Hodgkin—These prints bulge impressively with meaning. But what is it? In the large lithographs, which dominate the show, the artist liberally applies sponge and splatter to create fields of often lurid color which harbor incongruous juxtapositions of symbols, fragments of the human form, and suggestions of interior space, including a few that imply theatre sets. The most haunting piece is a monochrome etching titled "All Alone in the Museum of Modern Art," although the poetic gloom is more suggestive of a moonlit Japanese teahouse. Through March 8. (Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 888-4220.)

"That Way Madness Lies: Expressionism and the Art of Gugging"—The artists at the Gugging mental hospital, near Vienna, most of whom have no prospect of recovery, had their first show in 1970. Displaying their work alongside that of various Expressionists, who tended to glorify madness, is a fruitful idea. The patients' intense output stands up well against the Expressionists'. Through March 15. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

"Against the Grain"—Paintings by four publicity-shy artists—Howard Daum (1918-88), Norris Embry (1921-81), Sam Glankoff (1894-1982), and Ralph Rosenborg (1913-1992)—who shared a late-career surge in productivity. Through March 15. (Snyder, 20 W. 57th St. 262-1160.)

Short List—**WILLIAM BECKMAN,** Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545. Through March 22. . . . **PIERRE BONNARD** and **MARK ROTHKO,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through March 22. . . . **JOHN BOWMAN** and **SUSANNA COFFEY,** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050. Both shows through March 15. . . . **THEODORE EARL BUTLER,** York, 21 E. 65th St. 772-9155. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; through March 21. . . . **RICHARD DEACON,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through March 29. . . . **WILLEM DE KOONING,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 243-0200. Through March 29. . . . **ROBERT AND SONIA DELAUNAY,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Through March 15. . . . **PHILIP EVERGOOD,** Dintenfass, 20 E. 79th St. 581-2268. Through March 22. . . . **WILLIAM KIENBUSCH,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Through March 15. . . . **MATTA,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. 752-0124. Through March 22. . . . **ROBERT MOTHERWELL,** Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7288. Through March 29. . . . **LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY,** McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. 319-1996. Open Mondays; through April 5. . . . **NEIL WELLIVER,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; through March 8.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Jean-Marc Bustamante—Photographs, sculptures, and wall-mounted reliefs by the French artist. The photographs—of dismal suburbs of Barcelona—seem to belong within the lineage of conceptual/documentary photography; the sculptures and reliefs are utterly and bizarrely opaque. Through April 19. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.)

Jonathan Hammer—"The Fantast" and "Portrait of a Man Holding a Heart-Shaped Book," two complex installations incorporating numerous mediums: books, drawings, video, even a carpet. In an elegantly elliptical manner, Hammer traces various narratives involving

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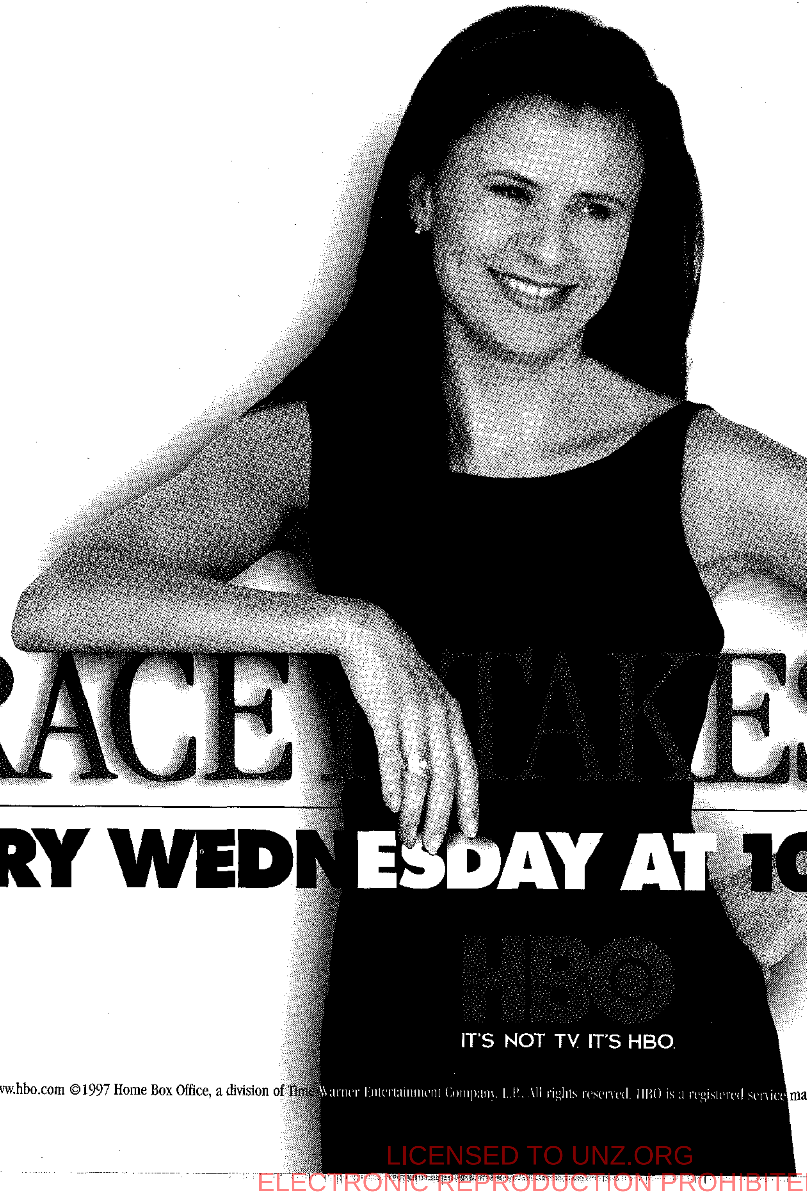
SHE'S A SMALL WONDER, AS USUAL..."
Hollywood Reporter



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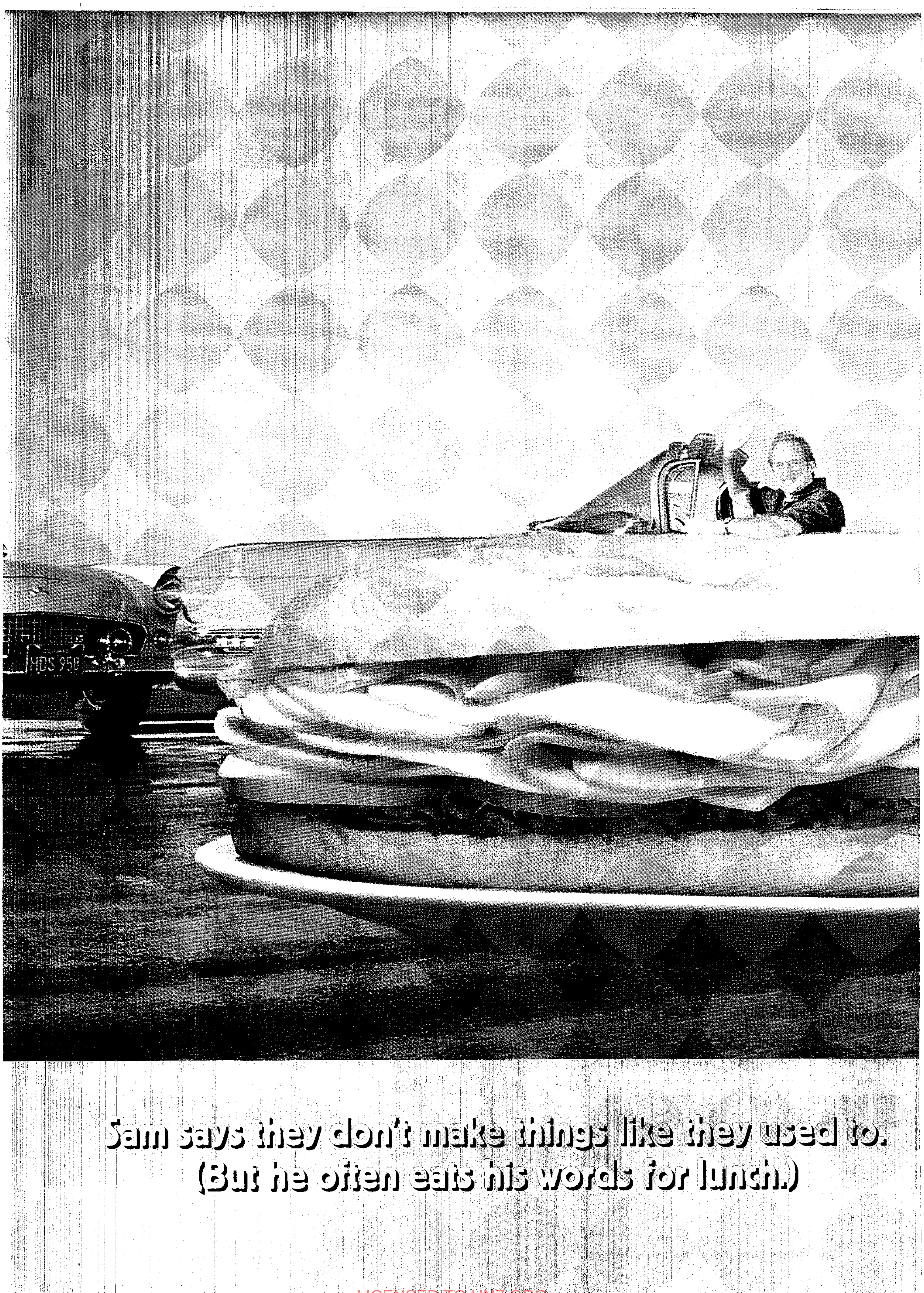

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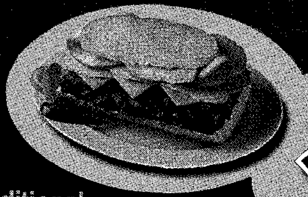

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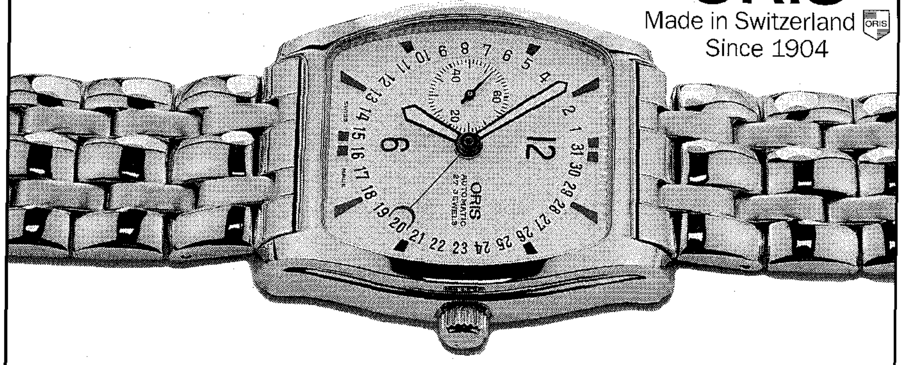

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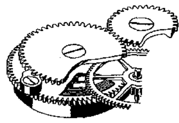

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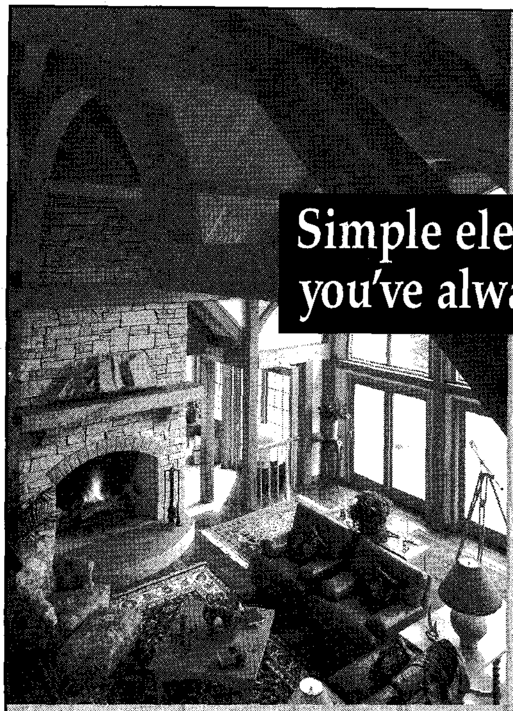

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the Surrealist writer René Crevel, the Zurich Dadaist Hugo Ball, and, rather provocatively, the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre. The elaborately bound books (which are what the artist has been best known for heretofore) were made in collaboration with John Baldessari, Kay Rosen, Donald Baechler, and James Brown. Through March 29. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200.)

SHORT LIST—**MARK BEARD** and **BRUCE SARGEANT**, Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Both shows through March 9. . . . **JOANNE GREENBAUM**, D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through March 23. . . . **ALEX KATZ**, Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Through March 16. . . . **KEVIN LANDERS**, XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111. Through March 22. . . . **TED VICTORIA**, De Folin, 529 W. 20th St. 242-3434. Through March 9.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

BETH B / CECILY ROSE BROWN—"Portraits" and "Playthings," two installations, the former consisting of photographs of female genitals, the latter including dolls and other toys, some mechanized. Sexuality, childhood, and suggestions of trauma—all so very contemporary (and a bit repellent). / "Spectacle," paintings of debauched bunnies. They're a long way from Peter Rabbit, but Brown's painterly technique, rich in sloppy, sexy brushwork, is engaging. Both shows through March 8. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

DAVID BLACK—Wide-eyed tableaux of upper-class Schadenfreude ("The Benefit Dinner," "The Costume Party," "The Backers' Audition") in appropriately sunny colors. The show offers several plein-air landscapes in homage to the marzipan light of France, but Black is at his most delicious as a satirist. Through April 8. (D.F.N., 560 Broadway. 334-3400.)

JOCELYN HOBBIE / PHILIPPE HERNANDEZ—Small, daintily painted panels that represent the confluence of thwarted sexuality and spiritual maiming. Usually set in bleak, idealized landscapes, these dreamy visions reinvent Surrealism, but they owe as much to the elegant nightmares of Brueghel as to Miró or Dali. There's also a hint in them of the polished, opaque surfaces of Persian miniatures. / An amusing set of small signs (most of them painted on glass and flashed up with aluminum foil) that mock tacky commercial designs, by a French artist living in Mexico. Both shows through March 8. (Tilton, 49 Greene St. 941-1775.)

AMALIA MESA-BAINS—"Cihuatlampa: The Place of the Giant Women" presents icons from a mix-and-match Meso-American matriarchy. Some quotations pencilled on the wall betray the project's earnestness, but the best pieces balance the girth of the figures with light materials, as in the earth mother covered in architectural moss, or the airy copper-mesh pumps suitable for a fifty-footer. Through April 15. (Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224.)

LINDA ST. JOHN—Bright fabulist drawings of the artist's childhood in Harrisburg, Illinois, done with Cray-pas and a seam ripper. With an electric-orange outline around their teddy-bear bodies, father, mother, and children appear to be on fire. In such works as "Bullet Ride," "Tilt-A-Whirl," and "Love and Minimum Wage," St. John's child's-eye view is part Faulkner, part "Harold and the Purple Crayon." Loose-leaf notebooks at the gallery desk offer accompanying stories (for "Drunk Driving," the text begins: "When he was roaring down the road drunk, one eye closed so he wouldn't see double . . ."), but the innocent horror of the drawings doesn't require amplification. Through March 9. (Bridges and Bodell, 13 E. 7th St., near Second Ave. 477-1820.)

SHORT LIST—**CARL ANDRE**, Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599. Opens at 1; through March 31. . . . **ARMAN**, Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through March 15. . . . **PAUL GIOVANOPOULOS**, Meisel, 141 Prince St. 677-1340. Through March 22. . . . **KENNETH GOLDSMITH**, Bravin Post Lee, 80 Mercer St. 966-2676. Through March 7. . . . **MARK GREENWOLD**, Kind, 136 Greene St. 925-1200. Through April 15. . . . **CALLUM INNES**, Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through April 5. . . . **KEVIN LARMON**, Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200. Through March 8. . . . **BARRY**

le va, Nolan/Eckman, 560 Broadway. 925-6190. Through March 8. . . . **charles long,** Bonakdar, 130 Prince St. 925-8035. Through March 22. . . . **tatsuya mc coy,** Kreps, 580 Broadway. 965-1911. Through March 15. . . . **kerri scharlin,** Wooster Gardens, 558 Broadway. 941-6210. Through March 22. . . . **not vital,** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through March 22. . . . **thomas woodruff,** P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway. 941-8642. Through March 15.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Manuel Alvarez Bravo—New York pulls out all the f-stops for the Mexican master photographer, who turns ninety-five this year. At the **museum of modern art,** a comprehensive retrospective that includes rare prints from the artist's personal archive continues through May 18. . . . ¶ At **throckmorton,** forty prints by the artist and his first wife, Lola Alvarez Bravo. (153 E. 61st St. 223-1059. Through May 3.) . . . ¶ At **robert miller,** more vintage prints, in coöperation with Throckmorton. (41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through March 8.) . . . ¶ At **witkin,** ninety-five prints (including some vintage color) from 1927 to 1996, along with photographs by Colette Alvarez Urbajtel, who married Alvarez Bravo in 1959. (415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Through May 3.)

Louise Lawler—"Paint, Wall, Pictures: Something Always Follows Something Else," an expansive installation of photographs and sculptures whose main element is a series of large-scale photographs documenting the renovation of Metro Pictures' new Chelsea space. It should come as no surprise that Lawler, an artist ever attentive to the conditions of art's display, has turned her eye to the transformation of the gallery that exhibits her work. Through March 15. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Open Tuesdays; closed Sundays.)

David Levinthal—The first large survey of the artist's series of inanimate figures in elaborate dioramas: cowboys, storm troopers, bathing beauties, sex-and-bondage figurines, black-face icons. Through March 21. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Jörg Sasse—Digitally enhanced photographs of the contemporary German cityscape. Handsomely produced, they suffer from the typical affliction of this sort of highly ironic, distanced work: the artist's attempt to exaggerate the banality of modern urban life succeeds mainly in glamorizing it. (What's more banal than reality?) Still, there are some memorable images: a monumental vision of a hideous postwar housing project enveloped in a cloud of dust, which appears to float like a mirage, and a series of luridly colored curtains that are meant to suggest mystery but really have nothing to conceal. Through March 15. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.)

"Portraits"—Nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples by Diane Arbus, Cecil Beaton, Walker Evans, McDermott and McGough, Eudora Welty, and others. Through March 8. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays.)

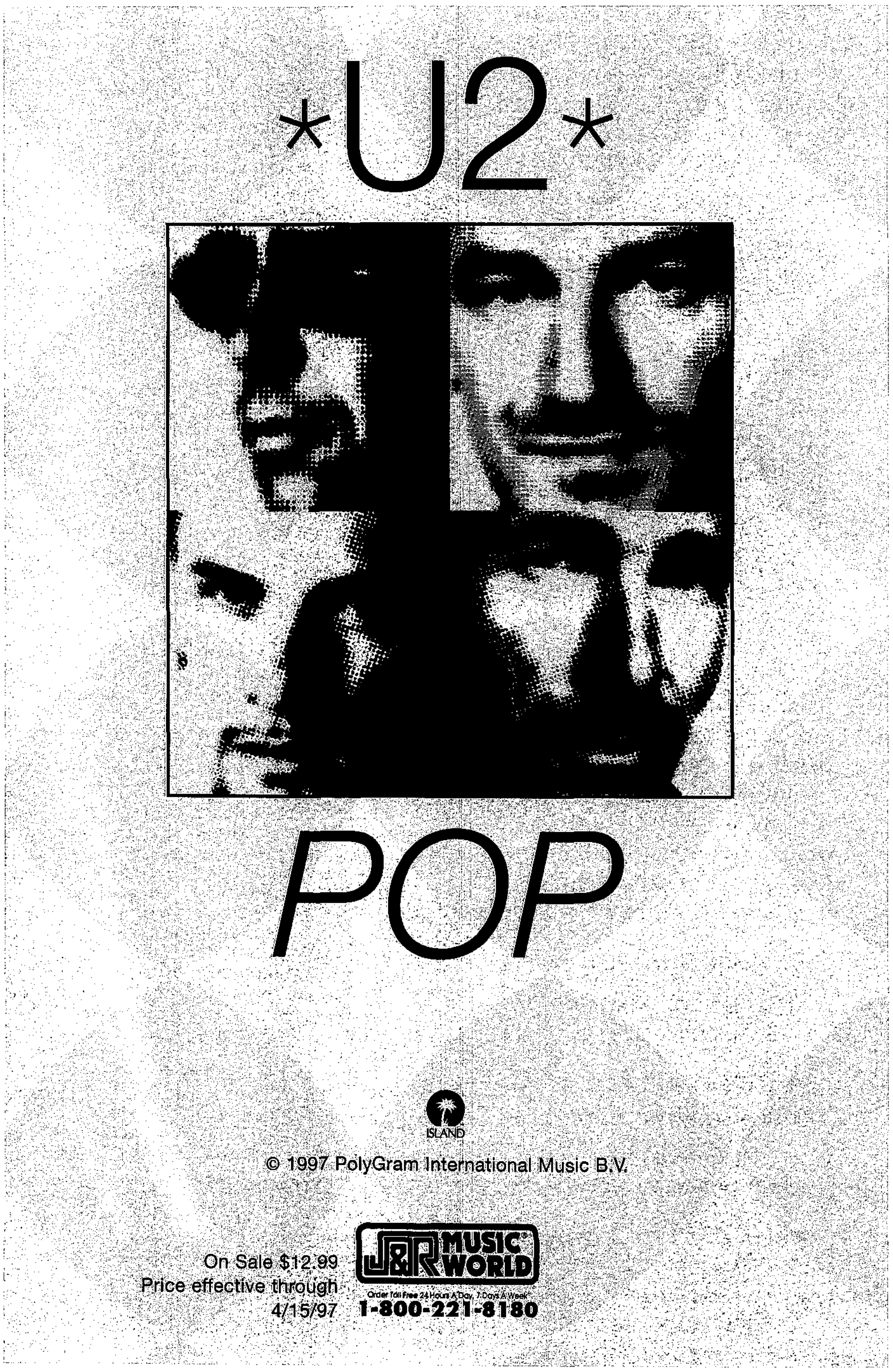
"Someone Else with My Fingerprints"—Work by some of the medium-greats (not always represented by the best prints) side by side with pictures by postmodernists and lots of fun junk, all of it designed to prove that the image has an authority that transcends the photographer's power to control it. The point, once made, gets made again and again, but the exhibit is a mind-bending grab bag, mixing Weegee, Lisette Model, Diane Arbus, Robert Frank, Mike Kelley, and Richard Prince with publicity stills from "The Incredible Shrinking Man" and "Star Trek": all images are created equal. Through March 15. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

"Viewing Olmsted"—A travelling exhibition of very fine work, commissioned by the *Canadian Centre for Architecture, by Robert Burley,* Lee Friedlander, and Geoffrey James, who over seven years visited and revisited Frederick Law Olmsted landscapes throughout North America—from Mount Royal Park, in Montreal, to Mountain View Cemetery, in Oakland. Through March 15. (Equitable, Seventh Ave. at 52nd St. 554-4818. Open Mondays.)

International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (860-1777)—"Written in Memory: Portraits of the Holocaust," Jeffrey A. Wolin's images of survivors with handwritten texts on the surfaces of the prints. Through April 20. . . . ¶ "War Story," an installation by Mikael Levin. Through April 20. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**jeannette montgomery barron,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through March 22. . . . **richard billingham,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through March 22. . . . **elinor carucci,** Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. 780-0071. Through March 8. . . . **lois conner,** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220. Through April 19. . . . **mary kelly,** Postmasters, 80 Greene St. 941-5711. Through March 15. . . . **saul leiter,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through April 5. . . . **esko männikkö,** Morris Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. 243-3753. Through March 30. . . . **bob mitchell,** Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through March 15. . . . **andrea modica,** Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300. Through April 19. . . . **barbara morgan,** Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through April 5. . . . **eli reed,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through March 8. . . . **andrea robbins and max becher,** Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831. Through April 5. . . . **david seltzer,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Through March 29. . . . **andres serrano,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays; through April 12. . . . **frederick sommer** and **jim dine,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Both shows through April 5. . . . **nick waplington,** Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555. Through April 12. . . . **oliver wasow,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through March 29. . . . **james welling,** Gorney, 100 Greene St. 966-4480. Through March 29.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of the City of New York.)



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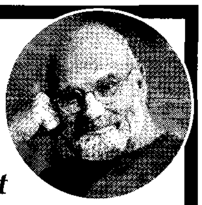

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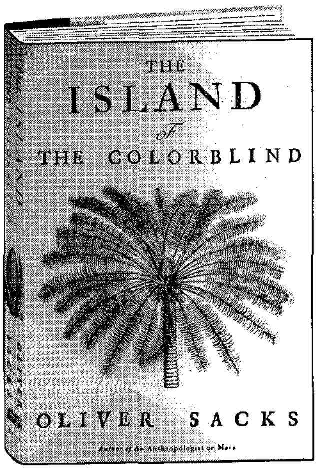

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

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OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**BILLY BUDD,** with Philip Langridge, Dwayne Croft, and James Morris; conducted by Steuart Bedford. (March 5 and March 11 at 8, and March 8 at 1:30.) . . . **AIDA,** with Sharon Sweet, Barbara Dever, Michael Sylvester, and Juan Pons; Adam Fischer. (March 6 at 8.) . . . With Ms. Sweet, Dolora Zajick, Mr. Sylvester, and Sherrill Milnes; Mr. Fischer. (March 10 at 7:30.) . . . **UN BALLO IN MASCHERA,** with Aprile Millo, Youngok Shin, Stefania Toczyska, Kristján Jóhannsson, and Mr. Pons; Franz Vote. (March 7 at 8.) . . . **LA BOHÈME,** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Gwynne Geyer, Richard Leech, and Haijing Fu; Nello Santi. (March 8 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

"MÉDÉE"—Cherubini's 1797 opera did not lack for discerning admirers in the decades that followed its unveiling: Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Schumann, and Wagner all spoke of it with reverence, and Brahms called it "the work we musicians recognize among ourselves as the highest peak of dramatic music." By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Cherubini's style—particularly the heroic-tragic bearing of "Médée"—had grown hopelessly antique, and the work fell into oblivion until Maria Callas famously championed it in the nineteen-fifties (though in a far from authentic version). In this concert staging by Opera Quotannis (a local company dedicated to historically informed performances), the piece regains its original opéra-comique format, with spoken dialogue separating the musical numbers. Bart Folse conducts a period-instrument orchestra and a cast that includes sopranos Phyllis Treigle and Thaïs St. Julien, mezzo-soprano D'Anna Fortunato, tenor Carl Halvorson, and baritone David Arnold. (Alice Tully Hall. March 6 at 8.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA—Opening performances of the spring season, which continues through April 27. **LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN.** (March 7 at 8.) . . . **THE MIKADO.** (March 8 at 1:30 and March 11 at 8.) . . . **LA BOHÈME.** (March 8 at 8.) . . . **CARMEN.** (March 9 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

OPERA THEATRE COMPANY OF DUBLIN—In the opening performance of Handel's opera "Amadigi." (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. March 11 at 7:30. Through March 15.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—Colin Davis leads Verdi's Requiem, with soprano Kallen Esperian, mezzo-soprano Markella Hatziano, tenor Stuart Neill, bass René Pape, and the New York Choral Artists. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 5-6 and March 8 at 8, and March 11 at 7:30.)

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA—Recently *le tout* Vienna was amazed when sources at the Vienna Philharmonic suggested that in the coming decade the orchestra might contemplate admitting women to its ranks. Denials followed, but the furor didn't subside until last week, when the orchestra called a press conference to announce that harpist Anna Lelkes would at last be granted full membership in the organization, and that women would be welcomed at its annual auditions in June. This week, Daniel Barenboim leads the orchestra in three concerts at Carnegie Hall. March 7 at 8: Beethoven's Symphonies No. 5 and No. 6. . . . ¶ March 8 at 8: Mozart's Symphony No. 29 and Bruckner's Symphony No. 9. . . . ¶ March 9 at 2: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Mr. Barenboim doubling as soloist) and Strauss's "Ein Heldenleben."

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S—It's not often that an entire orchestra donates its services to a charitable event, but Classical Action, which has mobilized the classical and jazz communities in the fight against AIDS, proved an irresistible magnet for the good will of the St. Luke's players, as well as for the evening's soloist (soprano Renée Fleming) and conductor (André Previn). The program is dense with the lushest sort of symphonic beauty: Mozart's Symphony No. 39, Barber's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," Vaughan Williams's "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis," and Strauss's "Four Last Songs." (Carnegie Hall. March 9 at 7.)

CINCINNATI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA—Jesús López-Cobos conducts Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole" and G-Major Piano Concerto (with Alicia de Larrocha) and Dvořák's "From the New World" Symphony. (Carnegie Hall. March 10 at 8.)

CINCINNATI POPS ORCHESTRA—Erich Kunzel leads Hollywood scores. (Carnegie Hall. March 11 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARBARA HENDRICKS AND YEFIM BRONFMAN—The soprano and the pianist offer a program that includes Prokofiev's "Five Songs with Poems by Anna Akhmatova" and Piano Sonata No. 8 and songs by Schumann (including "Frauenliebe und -leben"). (Alice Tully Hall. March 5 at 8.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS—The modern-music group offers music by Christopher Rouse, Chinary Ung, and Louis Karchin. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. March 5 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

STEVE REICH—The composer is on hand to discuss several of his works (including "Clapping Music" and "Different Trains"), with performances by his own ensemble. Several non-Reich pieces, featuring Lionhart (a men's choral group), round out the program. (Weill Recital Hall. March 5 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC—Presenting piano trios by Haydn and Fauré, among other works. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. March 6 at 7:30 and March 9 at 4.)

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF EUROPE WIND SOLOISTS—Offering Beethoven's Octet, Janáček's "Mládi," Villa-Lobos's "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 6," and Mozart's C-Minor Serenade (K. 388). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 6 at 8.)

"STRINGS ATTACHED"—This series, which addresses ways that avant-garde composers make use of plucked strings, continues with music by Paul Dresher, Aaron Jay Kernis, Steve Reich, and others; with guitarist David Tanenbaum and the Paul Dresher Ensemble. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 6 at 8.)

ANTON NEL—The pianist performs sonatas by Scarlatti, Ginastera, and Schubert (in B-Flat Major, D. 960), as well as Debussy's "Estampes." (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 6 at 8.)

AURYN STRING QUARTET—The foursome performs Henze's Quartet No. 5 ("In Memoriam Benjamin Britten"), Britten's Quartet No. 3, and Beethoven's Quartet No. 14. (Weill Recital Hall. March 7 at 8.)

BEAUX ARTS TRIO—An all-Beethoven program, comprising the Piano Trios in G Major (Op. 1, No. 2), in B-Flat Major (WoO 39), and in E-Flat Major (Op. 70, No. 2), as well as the Fourteen Variations in E-Flat Major (Op. 44). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 7-8 at 8.)

BACHMANN-KLIBONOFF-FRIDMAN TRIO—The group's survey of Brahms's chamber music continues with the C-Minor Piano Trio, the Horn Trio, and the Piano Quintet; violinist Robert Chen, violist Dan Panner, and French hornist Robert Routch assist. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. March 8 at 7. For information about tickets, call 333-5200.)

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY—The pianist performs Beethoven's Sonatas in G Major (Op. 31, No. 1) and D Minor (Op. 31, No. 2), as well as works by Prokofiev (including his Sonata No. 8). (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 9 at 3.)

FLORENCE GOULD HALL CHAMBER PLAYERS—In this wide-ranging program, baritone Christopher Trakas and pianist Samuel Sanders are featured in *mélodies* by Poulenc, Roussel, and Ravel; flutist Patrick Gallois, violist Pierre-Henri Xuereb, and cellist Yehuda Hanani complete the program with works by Piazzolla, Enescu, De Falla, Villa-Lobos, and Michel Merlet. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. March 9 at 3.)

William Schimmel—The accordionist plays Sofia Gubaidulina's "De Profundis" as well as the première of his own Symphony No. 6 ("Pathetic/Pastorale"). (Bloomingdale House, 323 W. 108th St. March 9 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

Fodor Wind Quintet—A Dutch ensemble, performing woodwind quintets by Reicha, Janáček (a transcription of "On the Overgrown Path"), Josef Förster, Rudolf Escher, and Willem van Manen. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. March 9 at 5.)

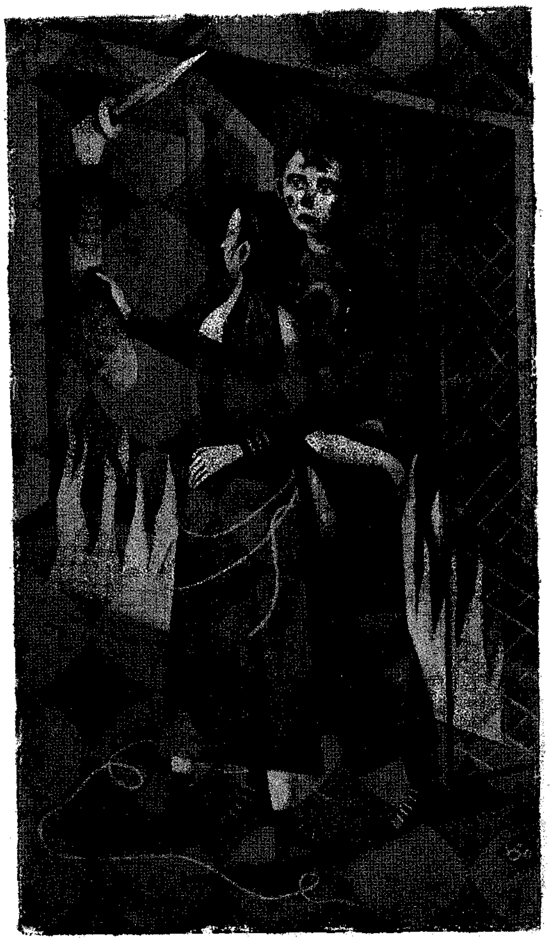
Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Performing Stephen Paulus's Quintet for Flute, Piano, and Strings; Schumann's Piano Trio No. 1; and Mendelssohn's String Quintet No. 2. (Alice Tully Hall. March 9 at 5 and March 11 at 7:30.)

New York Virtuosi Chamber Players—Presenting piano trios by Schubert (in B-Flat Major), Turina, and Brahms (in C Minor). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 9 at 8.)

Concert Royal—Members of the period-instrument orchestra play Bach's "Musical Offering." (Alice Tully Hall. March 10 at 8.)

New Music Consort—Presenting music by four contemporary Chinese composers: Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Zhour Qinru, and Zhou Long. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 494. March 10 at 8.)

Sonidos de las Americas—In this year's concerts at Weill Recital Hall, the annual mini-festival focusses on music by Puerto Rican composers. March 10 at 8: Pianist José Ramos-Santana and violinist Henry Hutchinson perform works by Héctor Campos Parsi, Luis Antonio Ramírez, Raymond Torres-Santos, and others. . . . ¶ March 11 at 8: Traditional music performed by Los Pleneros de la 21, plus Willam Ortiz's "Rican," a "bilingual street opera" conducted by Tania León. (The festival concludes on March 16.)



Handel's "Amadigi," performed by the Opera Theatre Company of Dublin, at BAM's Majestic Theatre.

GÉRARD DUBOIS

Michael Schönheit—The organist of the Leipzig Gewandhaus plays music by Bach, Schumann, Mendelssohn (his Sonata No. 6), and Reger. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. March 11 at 8.)

Four by Three—The intrepid Francesco Trio performs piano trios by Beethoven (in E-Flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2), Brahms (in C Major, Op. 87), Mel Powell ("Trio '94"), and Olly Wilson. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 11 at 8.)

Ensemble 21—The modern-music group performs pieces by Milton Babbitt ("Accompanied Recitative"), David Pickel, Martin Bresnick, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Curtis Curtis-Smith, and David Rakowski. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 11 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

New York Under Cover—At its spring festival this weekend, the Empire Quilters' Guild presents lecturers, venders, and a hundred and fifty examples of its members' handiwork. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. March 8 from 10 to 7 and March 9 from 10 to 5. For more information, call 860-2913.)

Readings—March 7 at 7: Poets Robert Creeley and Deborah Digges read from their work. (D'Agostino Hall, New York University, 108 W. 3rd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 10 at 7:30: John Ashbery and Tom Breydenbach read their poetry. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 10 at 8: Mary Gordon reads selections from her recent fiction, and Kathyrn Harrison reads from her memoir of incest, "The Kiss." (Fez, Time Café, 380 Lafayette St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ March 11 at 7: David Malouf delves into his latest novel, "The Conversations at Curlow Creek." (Shakespeare & Co., 939 Lexington Ave., at 69th St. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—March 5 at 6: Kinshasha Holman Conwill, director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, film critic David Denby, and administrator of high-school arts education Hollis Headrick address the question "Will America's Children Be Cultural Illiterates?" (American Craft Museum, 40 W. 53rd St. For reservations, which are required, call 687-2875.) . . . ¶ March 7 at 6:30: Urbanist Marshall Berman provides the keynote address for a symposium on the changes in Times Square, which continues the following day from 10:30 to 6. Speakers include cultural critic Marshall Blonsky, architects Michael Sorkin and Robert A. M. Stern, writers Frank Rich and Samuel Delany, and former head of Euro Disney Robert Fitzpatrick. (Avery Hall, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary. For more information, call 854-8165.) . . . ¶ March 8 at 2: Poet Nick Cabó moderates a discussion about the literature of the Philippines, featuring writers Eric Gamalinda, Jessica Hagedorn, and others. A reading by the panelists and other writers, including Luis H. Francia and Regie Cabico, follows. (Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. For more information, call 517-2742.)

Walk—March 8 at 1: Eliza Starr Byard, a graduate student in American history and a granddaughter of the late counsel for Trinity Church in what was a generations-long lawsuit over the sale of its former farmlands (now known as Tribeca), leads a Big Onion Walking Tour through the triangle below Canal Street. (For more information, call 439-1090.)

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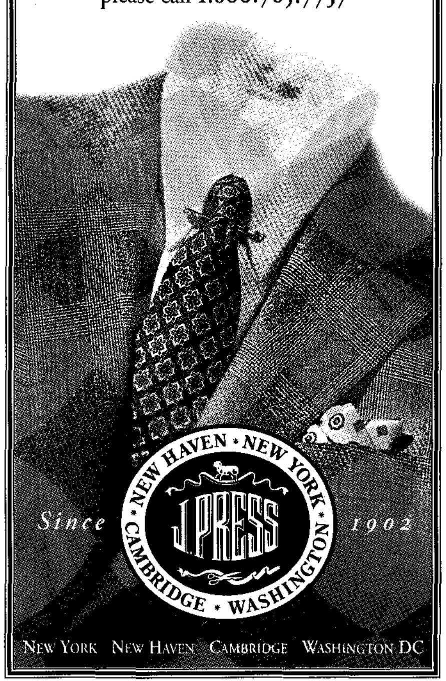

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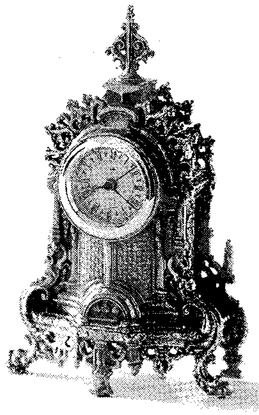

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THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

BOYS LIFE 2—Four short films on gay themes. Opening March 7. (Quad Cinema.)

THE DAYTRIPPERS—Writer-director Greg Mottola's study of five Long Islanders (Hope Davis, Anne Meara, Pat McNamara, Parker Posey, and Liev Schrieber) on a drive to Manhattan. Opening March 5. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE EIGHTH DAY—An examination of the developing friendship between a salesman (Daniel Auteuil) and a young man with Down's syndrome (Pascal Duquenne). Written and directed by Jaco Van Dormael. In French. Opening March 7. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

FLIPPING—Hollywood wiseguys, betrayal, and love, in a drama written and directed by Gene Mitchell. Opening March 7. (Embassy 4.)

GENTLEMEN DON'T EAT POETS—A butler and his wife (Sting and Trudie Styler) enter the service of a paleontologist and his wife (Alan Bates and Theresa Russell), in John-Paul Davidson's dark comedy, set in England in 1949. Adapted by Patrick McGrath from his 1988 novel, "The Grotesque." Opening March 7. (Waverly.)

GOOD LUCK—A paraplegic dental technician (Gregory Hines) and a blind football player (Vincent D'Onofrio) enter a raft race down the rapids of Oregon's Rogue River. Directed by Richard LaBrie; written by Bob Comfort. Opening March 7. (Village East Cinemas.)

JUNGLE 2 JUNGLE—A New York businessman (Tim Allen) brings his teen-age son (Sam Huntington)—raised by his estranged wife (JoBeth Williams) in a South American jungle—home to the Big Apple, in a comedy directed by John Pasquin. Opening March 7. (Cinema I, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 2, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

PRIVATE PARTS—A comedy based on Howard Stern's 1993 autobiography, with Stern playing himself. Directed by Betty Thomas. Opening March 7.

RHYME & REASON—Peter Spirer's documentary look at hip-hop music, featuring Ice-T, Dr. Dre, and Tupac Shakur. Opening March 5. (Embassy 1 and Village East Cinemas.)

SUDDEN MANHATTAN—A black comedy written by, directed by, and starring Adrienne Shelly, as a woman with doubts about her sanity. Opening March 7. (19th Street East 6.)

THE WATERMELON WOMAN—Cheryl Dunye wrote, directed, and stars in this story of a black lesbian aspiring filmmaker investigating the life of a black silent-film actress. Opening March 5. (Film Forum.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 32.)

ABSOLUTE POWER—A sombre, boring little thriller directed by Clint Eastwood. He also stars, as a jewel thief who, while robbing the mansion of a Presidential-campaign contributor, witnesses a murder and then intrudes on the coverup conspiracy. The movie, based on David Baldacci's ridiculous right-wing bestseller, avoids the ponderousness of the liberal Grisham-based films, but Eastwood's slow, deliberate style and conservative cynicism drain the drama of thrills. The cast, a *Who's Who* of accomplished actors (Gene Hackman, Judy Davis, Ed Harris, Scott Glenn), makes the diatribe watchable, if not gripping, but only Laura Linney, in the role of Eastwood's estranged daughter, seems genuinely involved.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

BIG NIGHT—The actor Stanley Tucci co-wrote (with Joseph Tropiano), co-directed (with Campbell Scott), and co-stars (with Tony Shalhoub) in this elegant, leisurely low-budget comedy about a struggling Italian restaurant run by a pair of immigrant brothers. The unusually happy, relaxed ensemble includes Ian Holm, Isabella Rossellini, Minnie Driver, Allison Janney, and Campbell Scott. The big set piece—a lavish dinner in honor of the singer-bandleader Louis Prima—is a fitting climax to the movie's patient accumulation of savory and blissfully pointless delights: a convincing illustration of how keen pleasure for pleasure's sake can be.—T.R. (9/23/96) (Cinema 3.)

BLOOD & WINE—The plot of Bob Rafelson's gripping, repellent new thriller is a sticky web in which every character struggles to entrap the others; few come out of it alive, and none happy. Alex Gates (Jack Nicholson) has a wine business and a failing marriage; when it boils over into violence, his wife (Judy Davis) and stepson (Stephen Dorff) leave home, unknowingly taking with them a diamond necklace (it's good to see an old-style McGuffin again) that Alex and a safecracker (Michael Caine) have stolen. From here on we get a search-and-destroy picture—the kind of film in which a guy can break the legs of a close relative and then call a doctor. The movie itself, for all its thoughtfulness, remains oddly acrid and unlikable; the brutality is a turnoff, and Rafelson the storyteller is at odds with Rafelson the purveyor of mood. Still, the performances are crammed with seediness and pathos, and both Caine and Nicholson offer moving demonstrations of weary middle age, raging against the clock.—A.L. (2/17/97) (Art Greenwich Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, and 68th St. Playhouse.)

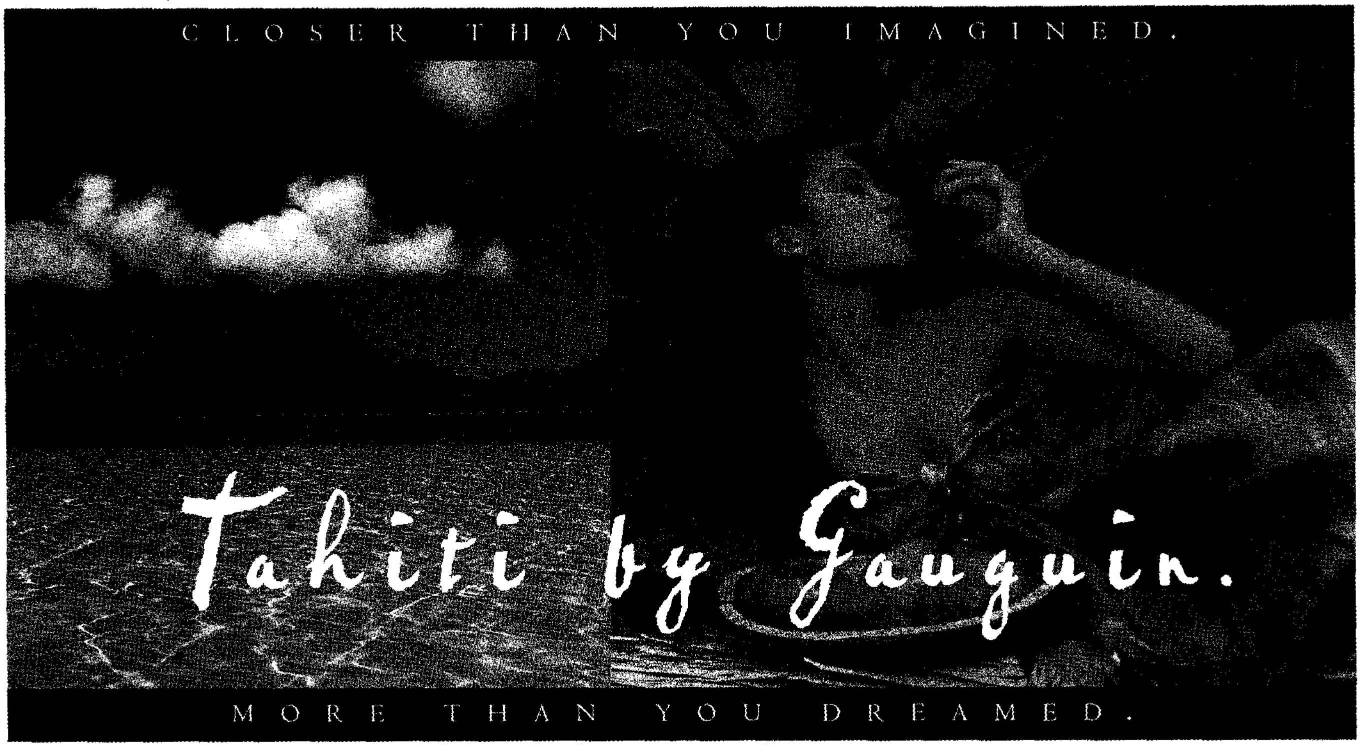
BOOTY CALL—Tommy Davidson, Jamie Foxx, Tamala Jones, and Vivica A. Fox star in a comedy that centers on a double date. Directed by Jeff Pollack. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Manhattan Twin, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

BREAKING THE WAVES—The Danish director Lars von Trier tells the sad story of a devout young Scottish woman (Emily Watson) who becomes a whore in order to save the life of her critically ill husband (Stellan Skarsgård). Von Trier gives the highbrow audience precisely what it wanted in the art-house boom years of the fifties and early sixties—nudity plus theology. The erotic-metaphysical hokum would be somewhat easier to take if the picture displayed anything resembling a genuine religious impulse.—T.R. (11/18/96) (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

LA CÉRÉMONIE—Jean-Pierre Cassel and Jacqueline Bisset hire the taciturn Sandrine Bonnaire as their new maid; she teams up with the local postmistress (Isabelle Huppert), and together they work themselves into a malignant fury. Director Claude Chabrol's skill is not in doubt here, but his film, adapted from a Ruth Rendell novel, is surprisingly weak on motive and continuity. In French.—A.L. (1/20/97) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas; through March 6.)

CYCLO—The adventures of a bicycle-taxi driver (Le Van Loc) in Ho Chi Minh City. Written and directed by Tran Anh Hung. In Vietnamese. (Film Forum 3.)

DANTE'S PEAK—A hopeless, humorless tale of an exploding volcano and a town's demise. It has the stereotypical scene of a dubious town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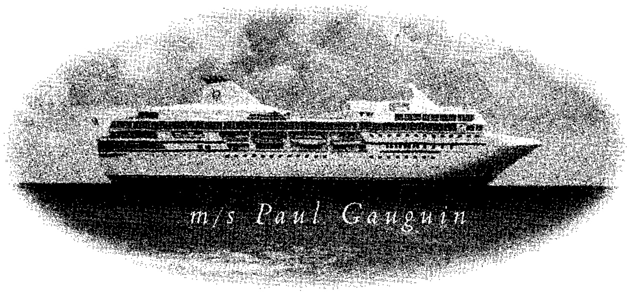

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council duking it out with visiting scientists over whether to evacuate (there's a developer ready to invest millions!) and a cast that includes two colorless leads (Pierce Brosnan and Linda Hamilton), two troublesome but cuddly children, a dog, and a grandmother who wades through a lake of sulfuric acid to get her relatives safely to shore. The dialogue is too banal even for a good laugh, and every risky situation is so familiar that you know what's going to happen before you've taken your seat. The special effects aren't very special, either—a little slow-moving lava, some flying boulders, and lots of gray ash. Universal, which invested more than a hundred million dollars in this turkey, deserves to lose every penny of it. Directed, rather shakily, by Roger Donaldson.—B.D. (Baronet, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, National Twin, Orpheum VII, and Waverly.)

Donnie Brasco—Mike Newell's study of the relationship between a federal agent (Johnny Depp) who infiltrates the mob and the hit man (Al Pacino) who befriends him. Screenplay by Paul Attanasio, from a memoir by Joe Piston. (Criterion Center, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, New York Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

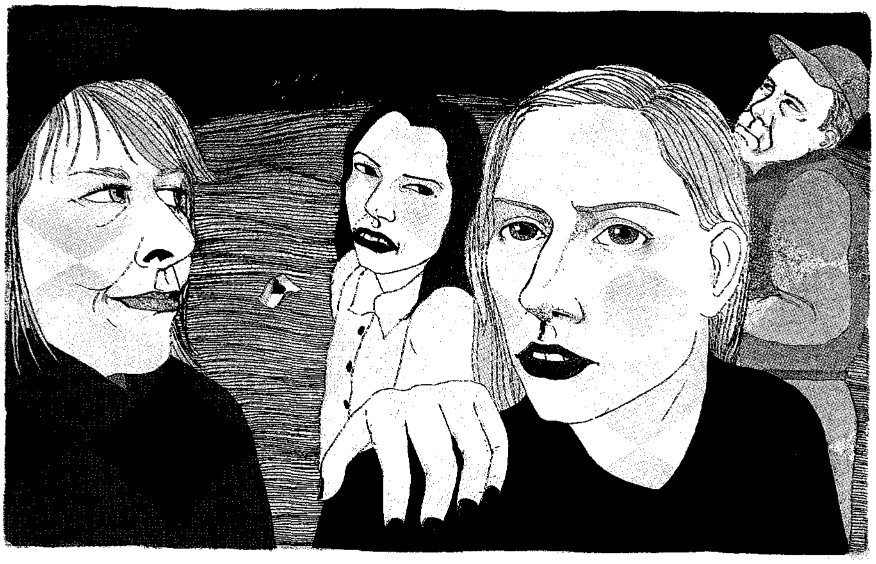
Everyone Says I Love You—Woody Allen's latest movie is one of his frothiest, and weirdest, to date: a throwback picture that tries to resurrect the spirit of thirties musicals without recourse to irony. There is a deliberate roughness to both the singing (which is kind of charming) and the choreography (which is unwieldy and a little graceless). The all-star cast includes Julia Roberts, Tim Roth, Drew Barrymore, and Alan Alda. You emerge bemused but undeniably cheered up, partly because of the uncomplicated magic of the climax, in which Allen dances with an airborne Goldie Hawn on the bank of the Seine.—A.L. (Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and 34th St. East.)

Hamlet—Kenneth Branagh's film uses the full text of the play (the running time is nearly four hours), it's shot in 70 mm., and the approach is daringly straightforward. The director himself plays the unhappy Prince, and so lucidly that every shift in the volatile character's mood seems perfectly natural. Derek Jacobi, as Claudius, and Julie Christie, as Gertrude, are also superb. Also with Richard Briers (Polonius) and Kate Winslet (Ophelia).—T.R. (1/13/97) (Paris.)

Jerry Maguire—Tom Cruise plays the title character, who is a glib, cocky agent for professional athletes. In the fluid opening scenes, the movie, which was written and directed by Cameron Crowe, promises to be something unusual—a comedy about the spiritual crisis of a shallow man. But the star quickly reverts to his familiar feisty, can-do shtick, and Crowe loses control of the fragile comic tone. Also with Renée Zellweger, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Bonnie Hunt.—T.R. (12/16/96) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

Kama Sutra—In Mira Nair's fairy tale, set in sixteenth-century India, Indira Varma plays a poor sexpot who seduces the king, gets cast out of her home, becomes a courtesan, and finally falls in love with the court sculptor (Ramon Tikaram, a hunk who looks like a stocky Indian Fabio). The movie succeeds so beautifully as a feast for the senses (over and over, gorgeous bodies embrace, and the music throbs invitingly) that Nair, apparently, sees no need to make the characters or the dialogue interesting. Sarita Choudhury is Varma's princess rival, and Naveen Andrews camps it up as the snooty, sybaritic king.—S.K. (Lincoln Square.)

Kolya—A likable enough Czech reworking of a tried-and-true formula: a sort of "Kramer vs. Kramer" set in Prague, in 1988-89, at the dawn of the Velvet Revolution. The screenwriter, Zdenek Sverak, also plays the central character, a bachelor cellist whose lonely, impoverished life symbolizes the whole country's stagnation. In a moment of financial panic he agrees to a young Russian woman's offer of money for marriage; she quickly emigrates, leaving him to care for her adorable five-year-old son. The cellist slowly grows out of his selfishness, and his love for this child who doesn't speak his language points to the new, boundariless world that's about to open up. Directed by Jan Sverak. In Czech.—S.K. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)



Opening March 5, Anne Meara, Parker Posey, Hope Davis, and Pat McNamara in Greg Mottola's "The Daytrippers."

LARA TOMLIN

Lost Highway—A film about love and murder, starring Bill Pullman, Patricia Arquette, and Balthazar Getty. Directed by David Lynch. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Marvin's Room—Jerry Zaks's strength-through-illness drama, adapted by the late Scott McPherson from his 1990 play. Bessie (Diane Keaton), who spends her time caring for her bedridden father (Hume Cronyn), discovers that she herself has leukemia; the search for a bone-marrow donor leads her to her sister, Lee (Meryl Streep), whom she hasn't seen in twenty years. Both women give it all they've got, but this cloying film doesn't deserve their generosity. Leonardo DiCaprio is highly convincing as Lee's dysfunctional son.—A.L. (1/20/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, Guild, Regency, 34th Street Showplace, and Village East Cinemas.)

Prisoner of the Mountains—A picture set against the background of the war in Chechnya, about two Russian soldiers captured and held in the hope of an exchange of prisoners. The director, Sergei Bodrov, unfolds his hushed brotherhood-of-man story in a showy but poetic way, filming the mountains and wheat fields surrounding the prison encampment with an elegant expansiveness that suggests Lean or Kurosawa. While the tale, which was inspired by a Tolstoy story, has the Russian everything-is-doomed mentality, it's swiftly told and filled with moody, haunted, compellingly fresh and beautiful images. In Russian.—B.D. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Rosewood—John Singleton's disappointingly conventional account of the 1923 massacre of an all-black village in Florida. The trouble broke out when a white woman's false claim that a black man had beaten her unleashed a merciless lynch mob. You'd think that was drama enough, but Gregory Poirier's screenplay shamelessly rips off everything from spaghetti Westerns (with Ving Rhames playing a mysterious gunslinging hero) to "Schindler's List" (Jon Voight as a mean white shopkeeper who suddenly gets a soul). There's also a lot of one-dimensional propaganda for African-American self-sufficiency—but neither it nor the crassest Hollywood fiddling can keep the evil of what happened from coming through; this is one of those bad movies that are worth seeing anyway. With Esther Rolle as a saintly matriarch, Don Cheadle as her proud son, and a very charming young actress, Elise Neal, as a sweet, gawky teen-age heroine.—S.K. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Secrets & Lies—Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), the heroine of Mike Leigh's broadest and most ambitious film to date, decides after the death of her adoptive mother to seek her biological one. The quest turns up Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn), who freaks out: Hortense is middle-class and black, Cynthia working-class and white. Jean-Baptiste gives a quiet, pacific performance; Blethyn deals in spasms of exaggeration which belong in another film altogether. Still, there is a fine supporting cast, and they all gather in the final scene, a cathartic barbecue that starts off as nicely choreographed light comedy and darkens to a Bergman-like chorus of wailing women and slightly overcooked dialogue.—A.L. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

Shine—The hero of Scott Hicks's absorbing biographical film is the Australian concert pianist David Helfgott (played, at different stages of his life, by Alex Rafalowicz, Noah Taylor, and Geoffrey Rush), who suffered a severe breakdown, spent years in mental institutions, and then, improbably, resumed his career. Although the movie's swiftness and lightness are pleasing, the over-all image they create is indistinct: it just evaporates in your head when the lights come up. Also with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lynn Redgrave, and John Gielgud (who's in especially buoyant comic form).—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, and Murray Hill Cinemas.)

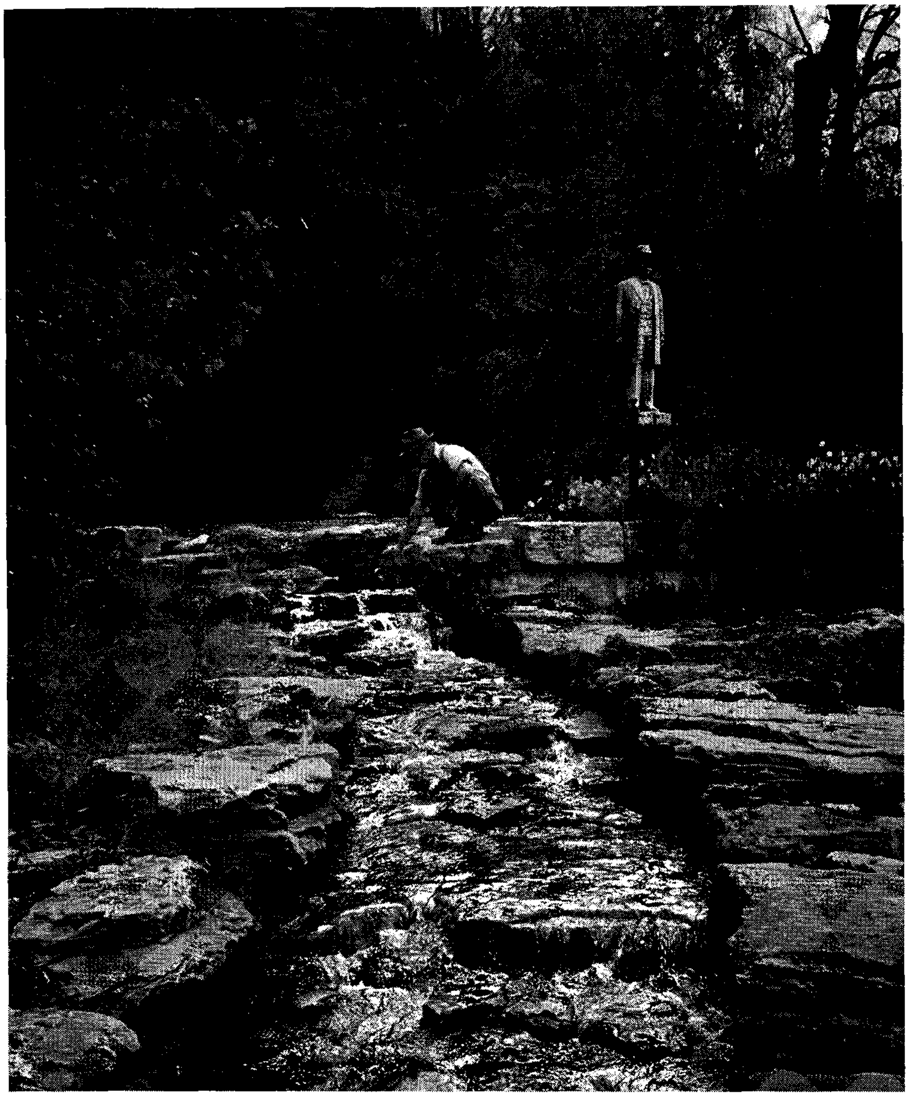
SLING BLADE—Billy Bob Thornton's dunderheaded film about a simpleton who, released from an asylum for the criminally insane after serving twenty-five years for the murder of his mother and her lover, returns to his poor Southern home town and ends up befriending a small boy and defending him against *his* mom's abusive boyfriend. The picture's critical success is mystifying—it's hard to believe that anybody could fall for its dim homilies. Thornton's performance as the slow-witted murderer whose heart is purer than any tobacco-chewing cracker's is excruciating, but the film does have two terrific actors—Dwight Yoakam, as the menacing boyfriend, and John Ritter, as a gay store manager—both of whom pick up entertainingly on small-town eccentricities. Thornton is capable of good work (he co-wrote and acted in the gritty, disturbing "One False Move"), but this is maudlin treacle of a kind that even "Forrest Gump" didn't stoop to.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center, Carnegie Hall Cinemas, and First & 62nd Cinemas.)

SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW—Bille August's film of Peter Hoeg's novel, in which the title character (Julia Ormond) sets out to prove that the death of a Copenhagen boy was not an accident. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Angelika Film Center, Beekman, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

TOUCH—Paul Schrader's adaptation of Elmore Leonard's novel about fundamentalist hucksterism tries hard to capture the anarchic élan of another recent Leonard adaptation, "Get Shorty." It has the marks of Schrader's past productions—a sleek visual style, piercing questions about faith and morality—but here the mix seems a little anemic. A bright batch of young actors, including Gina Gershon, Janeane Garofalo, and, in the central role of the boy who can heal the sick, Skeet Ulrich (who looks uncommonly like Johnny Depp), gives the film some zip, and Tom Arnold, as a woman-hating religious fanatic, gets the movie's best laughs; but the screenplay is a string of loose, circus-like vignettes (most of them involving people trying to take financial or emotional advantage of the boy's gift of healing) that are never really tied together in a grandly entertaining way.—B.D. (First & 62nd Cinemas.)

WAITING FOR GUFFMAN—If talent were enough, Christopher Guest's mock documentary about a small Missouri town celebrating its sesquicentennial would be one of the great recent comedies. Along with Guest, it stars such masterly offbeat character actors as Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, and Bob Balaban. But satire at this length needs a fresher, fairer target than pathetic small-town piety. Guest and Levy, the co-writers, seem to have had nothing in mind beyond the kind of characters they could work up; and, without any check on their instincts, the actors often fall back on meanness.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and Sutton.)

WHEN WE WERE KINGS—A foolproof documentary. Then again, it's hard to see how anyone could mess up the story of the 1974 fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman: the drama is all there, ripe for the telling, and the director, Leon Gast, grabs the opportunity with both hands. He takes a while to arrive at the bout, but in that he's true to the event—Don King orchestrated an endless buildup and decorated the occasion with a music festival, flying in such stars as James Brown and B. B. King. The performance footage is fun, but even so you itch to hear the blare of Ali's rhetoric and to watch him, at last, duck into the ring. To maintain the suspense, Gast enlists help from a wide range of Ali fans: George Plimpton, Spike Lee, and, above all, Norman Mailer, who talks about that night with the unabated excitement of a child. The fight has rarely been seen since then, and the way it naturally dramatized itself, right up to the final twist, is still enough to knock you cold.—A.L. (2/17/97) (Lincoln Square.)



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ASTOR PLAZA, 44th St. at Broadway.
BARONET, Third Ave. at 59th St.
BEEKMAN, Second Ave. at 66th St.
CARNEGIE HALL CINEMAS, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
CHELSEA CINEMAS, 260 W. 23rd St.
CHELSEA WEST, 333 W. 23rd St.
CINEMA I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA 3RD AVENUE, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA 3, 2 W. 59th St.
CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th St.
CORONET, Third Ave. at 59th St.
CRITERION CENTER, Broadway at 44th St.
EAST 85TH STREET, First Ave. at 85th St.
EASTSIDE PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84TH STREET SIXPLEX, Broadway at 84th St.
86TH STREET EAST TWIN, Third Ave. at 86th St.
EMBASSY I, Broadway at 46th St.
EMBASSY 2, 3, AND 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59TH STREET EAST CINEMA, 239 E. 59th St.
FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
FIRST & 62ND CINEMAS, 400 E. 62nd St.
GOTHAM CINEMA, Third Ave. at 58th St.
GUILD, 33 W. 50th St.
LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
LINCOLN SQUARE, Broadway at 68th St.
MANHATTAN TWIN, Third Ave. at 59th St.
METRO CINEMA I AND 2, Broadway at 99th St.
MURRAY HILL CINEMAS, 160 E. 34th St.
NATIONAL TWIN, Broadway at 44th St.
NEW YORK TWIN, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19TH STREET EAST 6, Broadway at 19th St.
OLYMPIA I AND II, Broadway at 107th St.
ORPHEUM VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
PARIS, 4 W. 58th St.
PARK & 86TH STREET CINEMAS, 125 E. 86th St.
QUAD CINEMA, 34 W. 13th St.
REGENCY, Broadway at 67th St.
THE SCREENING ROOM, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62ND & BROADWAY, 62 W. 62nd St.
64TH AND 2ND, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68TH ST. PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72ND STREET EAST, Third Ave. at 71st St.
STATE, Broadway at 45th St.
SUTTON I AND 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34TH ST. EAST, 241 E. 34th St.
34TH STREET SHOWPLACE, 238 E. 34th St.
VILLAGE EAST CINEMAS, Second Ave. at 12th St.
VILLAGE THEATRE VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
WAVERLY I AND 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
WORLDWIDE CINEMAS, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
ZIEGFELD, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT (1930)—Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel, on which this film is based, was already famous when Lewis Milestone directed this attack on the senseless human waste of war, made in Hollywood. It follows a handful of young German volunteers in the First World War from school to battlefield, and shows the disintegration of their romantic ideas of war, gallantry, and fatherland in the squalor of the trenches. Except for Louis Wolheim, who is capable of creating a character with a minimum of material, the actors—Lew Ayres, Slim Summerville, Russell Gleason, Billy Bakewell, John Wray, Raymond Griffith, Ben Alexander—are often awkward, uncertain, and overemphatic, but this doesn't seem to matter very much. The point of the film gets to you, and though you may wince at the lines Maxwell Anderson wrote (every time he opens his heart, he sticks his poetic foot in it), you know what he means.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; March 10.)

BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S (1961)—Audrey Hepburn's Holly Golightly is a tad refined for a girl who lives so improvisationally (on the money men give her), but for about the first three quarters of an hour, this picture, directed by Blake Edwards, has a fair amount of sophisticated slapstick comedy, especially at a cocktail party that ranks with the best screen parties of the era. If you've read the Truman Capote novella that the movie is based on (and even if you haven't) you may be dismayed to see things go soft and romantic. Mickey Rooney does a wild bit of racial caricature as the Japanese photographer who lives in the apartment above Holly's; it's the most lowdown and daring thing in the movie. The cast includes George Peppard, Patricia Neal, Buddy Ebsen, John McGiver, and Martin Balsam. Hepburn's clothes are by Givenchy and Neal's are by Pauline Trigere.—P.K. (A Different Light Bookstore; March 9.)

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (1980)—By far the most imaginative part of the "Star Wars" trilogy. George Lucas kept the first movie hopping by cutting it into short, choppy scenes; Irvin Kershner, who directed this one, is a master of visual flow, and, joining his own kinks and obsessions to Lucas's, he gave "Empire" a splendiferousness that may even have transcended what Lucas had in mind. The characters in this fairy-tale cliffhanger show more depth of feeling than they had in the first film, and the music—John Williams's variations on the "Star Wars" theme—seems to saturate and enrich the intensely clear images; scenes linger in the mind. With Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Billy Dee Williams, and Alec Guinness.—P.K. (Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Gotham Cinema, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA (1929)—Dziga Vertov celebrates the dynamic variety of quotidian urban life in his silent masterpiece, the apex of the symphony-of-the-street movie. Setting a prototype cameraman loose to chronicle an unnamed Soviet metropolis from dawn to dusk, he records the commotion on the boulevard and in the trolley yard, the kinetics of newfangled exercise machines that would fit right into today's infomercials, the goofiness and the chagrin at a bureau that handles both divorce and marriage. A protean stylist, Vertov deploys every device from split and superimposed images to pixilation and freeze frames; his film has wit as well as gusto, a clearheaded lyricism, and a robust, sometimes vaudevillian humor. (Was he the first to cut from a supine woman to a hurtling train?)—M.S. (Symphony Space; March 11.)

Star Wars (1977)—The loudness, the smash-and-grab editing, and the relentless pacing drive every idea from your head, and even if you've been entertained, you may feel cheated of some dimension—a sense of wonder, perhaps. It's an epic without a dream. Maybe the only real inspiration involved was to set its sci-fi galaxy in the pop-culture past, and to turn old-movie ineptness into conscious Pop art. The writer and director, George Lucas, has got the tone of bad movies down pat: you never catch the actors deliberately acting badly; they just seem to be bad actors, on contract to Monogram or Republic, their klunky enthusiasm polished at the Ricky Nelson school of acting. With Carrie Fisher as the princess-in-distress who talks tomboy-tough, Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker, Harrison Ford as Han Solo, and Alec Guinness as Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi.—P.K. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, National Twin, and Orpheum VII.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—"Le Samouraï" (1967, Jean-Pierre Melville; in French), with Alain Delon, Nathalie Delon, Cathy Rosier, and François Périer.

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; most in German, with English subtitles. March 6 at 1 and 6: "Berlin Alexanderplatz," Parts 8-11 (1980). . . . March 7 at 1 and 6: "Berlin Alexanderplatz," Parts 12-13 and Epilogue. . . . March 8 at 1: "Berlin Alexanderplatz," Parts 1-7. . . . March 9 at 1: "Berlin Alexanderplatz," Parts 8-13 and Epilogue. . . . ¶ The museum will be showing the films nominated for Academy Awards in the Foreign Language Feature category, on March 6-7 at 6 and 8:15. . . . ¶ From the museum's archives, a series of Academy Award winners in the Best Picture category. March 8 at 2:30 and March 9 at 5: "On the Waterfront" (1954, Elia Kazan), with Marlon Brando, Eva Marie Saint, and Karl Malden. . . . March 8 at 5: "It Happened One Night" (1934, Frank Capra), with Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable. . . . March 9 and March 11 at 2:30: "The Broadway Melody" (1929, Harry Beaumont), with Charles King. . . . March 10 at 2:30: "All Quiet on the Western Front" (†). . . . March 10 at 6: "Wings" (1927, William Wellman), with Charles Rogers, Gary Cooper, and Clara Bow. . . . ¶ March 10 at 6:30: "Death by Design" (1995), directed by Peter Friedman and Jean-François Brunat, who will be present.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films by or about Krzysztof Kieślowski; most in Polish, with English subtitles. March 5 at 2 and 6:30, March 6 at 4:15, and March 9 at 5:30: "The Scar" (1976). . . . March 5 at 4:15 and March 6 at 9: "Camera Buff" (1979). . . . March 5 at 8:45 and March 6 at 2: "No End" (1984). . . . March 7 at 2, 4, 6, 7:30, and 9, and March 8-9 at 4: "Krzysztof Kieślowski: I'm So-So" (1995, Krzysztof Wierzbicki). . . . March 8 at 5:30: "Blue" (1993, in Polish and French). . . . March 8 at 7:30: "White" (1994, in French). . . . March 8 at 9:15: "Red" (1994, in French). . . . March 9 at 8 and March 10 at 4 and 8: "Blind Chance" (1981). . . . March 10 at 2 and 6:15: "The Double Life of Véronique" (1991, in French and Polish). . . . ¶ March 8-9 at 2: "Planet of the Apes" (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner), with Charlton Heston.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 11 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Les Enfants" (1984, Marguerite Duras, Jean Mascolo, and Jean-Marc Turine; in French).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by Chantal Akerman; in French, with English subtitles. March 8 at 2: "Je Tu Il Elle" (1974). . . . March 8 at 4:30: "Night and Day" (1991). . . . March 9 at 2: "All Night Long" (1982). . . . March 9 at 5: "Portrait of a Girl at the End of the 1960s, in Brussels" (1994).

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—March 11 at 7: "JLG/JLG" (1994, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). . . . March 11 at 8:30: "The Man with the Movie Camera" (†).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On March 9 at 7, the feature will be "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (†).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—"Out of the Past" (1947, Jacques Tourneur), with Kirk Douglas, Robert Mitchum, and Jane Greer.

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—A program of new Mexican films; in Spanish, with English subtitles. March 5 at 7 and March 8 at 8: "Benjamin's Woman" (Carlos Carrera). . . . March 7 at 7 and March 9 at 4: "Marital Life" (Carrera). . . . March 8 at 4: Three short films. . . . March 8 at 6: "Lolo" (Francisco Athie). . . . March 9 at 6: "On the Air" (Juan Carlos de Llaca). . . . March 9 at 8: "The Garden of Eden" (Maria Novaro). . . . ¶ Two films by Jerome Hill. March 5 at 9: "Open the Door and See All the People" (1964). . . . March 6 at 9: "Film Portrait" (1971). . . . ¶ March 6 at 9: "Max My Love" (1986, Nagisa Oshima). . . . ¶ Films by Mike Leigh. March 7 at 7: Three short films. . . . March 10 at 7: "Nuts in May" (1976). . . . March 11 at 7: "The Kiss of Death" (1977). . . . ¶ March 7 at 9, March 8-9 at 4 and 9, and March 10-11 at 9: "Sleepover" (1995, John Sullivan). . . . ¶ March 7 at 9:30, March 8 at 9:45, March 9 at 10, and March 10-11 at 9:30: "Dead Man" (1995, Jim Jarmusch). . . . ¶ March 11 at 7: "L'Argent" (1983, Robert Bresson; in French).

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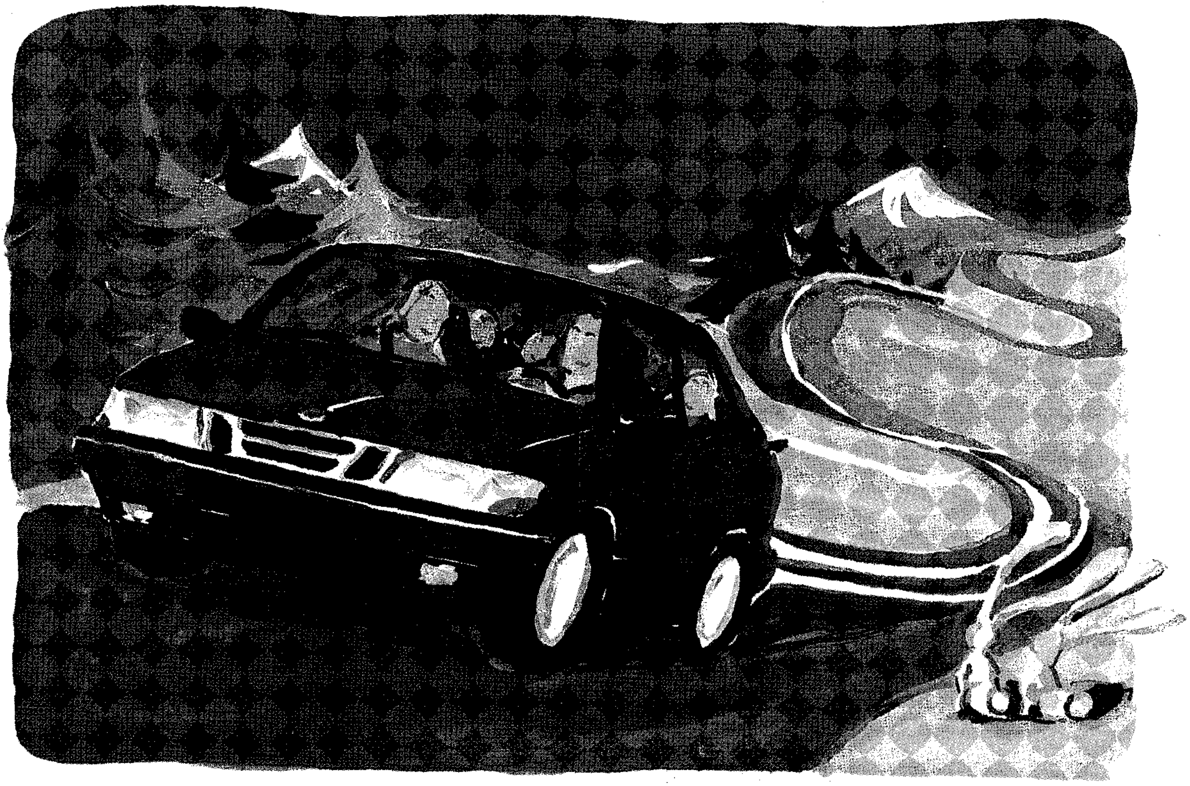
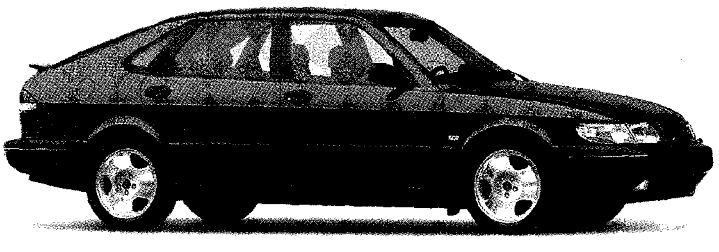


Shouldn't the family chauffeur have some fun?



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THE NEW YORKER

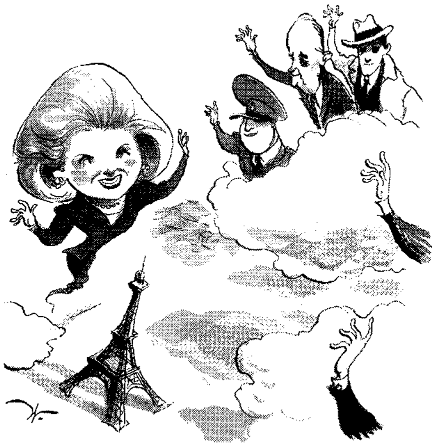
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

FRENCH TWIST

When Pamela Harriman fell at her post at the Ritz in Paris, the reaction in France took a generally admiring turn. "Scatter hot tears," the Chinese were ordered at the death of *their* Paramount Leader, and though nobody did that for Mrs. Harriman, her notices were not only respectful but affectionate. But then the circumstances of her death seemed to have had a stylish French twist. One story going the rounds was that she had been swimming with Bernard-Henri Lévy, the philosopher turned filmmaker, and that her last words were spoken to him in French: "*Ça ne va pas, ça ne va pas*" (meaning, roughly, "I'm not well"). Though it was not exactly the death scene from "Phèdre," the rumor that the American Ambassador on her way out had had the presence of mind to say something in French was, given the current pettish state of Franco-American relations, received as a nice diplomatic touch.

The affection in which Pamela Harriman was held in France has something to do with French esprit—Madeleine Albright, who is no one's idea of a femme fatale, is getting an equally infatuated press right now—and something to do with plain old-fashioned gallantry. Mrs. Harriman's ghost must have been grateful for the courtesy, since, across the Channel, they were on her while the body was still damp. The *Times* of London called her a "colourful courtesan," making it plain that, as far as Pamela Harriman was concerned, the age of chivalry was over. The usually dapper *Economist* published an attack in the guise of an obituary that catalogued her love affairs almost down to the footprints on the windshield, and tore the lady herself right to pieces, going after her looks ("not a great beauty, she kept a trim figure"), allowing her the kind of compliments that define the concept of grudging praise ("She was good to her two later husbands when they were dying"), and finally announcing, "At the end of the day, despite all those luxuries, it was a harsh life. Old British friends, especially, mocked her transparent ambition (which Americans took more at face value). Lovers she hoped to marry dumped her. . . . Was there not always, at the very back of her mind, just a nagging feeling that she was being laughed at, even scorned?"

The American press, though marginally less vengeful (one columnist did describe her activities during the Second World War as "dodging bombs and wrecking homes"), was equally unreal, being mostly from the My Sin branch of the Crêpes Suzette school of writing about France. As one obit writer said, Mrs. Harriman had, typically, been doing "relentless" laps in the Ritz's luxurious indoor pool. (An informant casts doubt on how relentless the laps could have been, since the pool is so short that a truly relentless lap would be over pretty much before you could say the words.)



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE

Mrs. Harriman was, after all, a familiar and—once upon a time—mostly sympathetic pop type. She was Forever Amber, Jezebel, Scarlett O'Hara, Linda Darnell, or even Bette Davis: a hussy, maybe, but a lot of fun to watch rising. (Had this life been played out in the eighteenth century, she would undoubtedly be the subject of an admiring biography or two by a feminist professor.) Her sins, such as they are, were carnal, not venal. Ben Franklin, who invented the Ambassador's role in Paris, did his dallying while he was actually on the job. At least nobody said that of Mrs. Harriman.

You also can't escape the suspicion that part of the problem was that she didn't go quite far enough; we like transgression these days, but we like it big. Had one of her lovers been someone *really* rotten—had she played footsie with Stalin or trysted with Mao—the American and British obituaries would probably have been, if not warmer, at least more respectful. For one of the things about Mrs. Harriman's list of conquests is that once you skim off a few of the tourist traps—Gianni Agnelli and Aly Khan—for the most part it's a distinguished list: Churchill *fils*, Edward R. Murrow, Jock Whitney, Leland Hayward, Averell Harriman. People who know the cast of characters point out that, at least in later years, she got to her men at low points in their lives, when they were just past their height and needed a little comfort.

Maybe the best epitaph for Mrs. Harriman was offered by a French lady who knows her way around the world. A couple of men, recalling the old rumor that Mrs. Harriman's success with men had been propelled by a peculiar sexual trick, were trying to remember exactly what the trick was. "There are no tricks," the lady said. "There is only enthusiasm."

OLYMPIAN SCOUT

The other day, Alexander Garvin gazed out over the rubble and weeds of an abandoned rail yard in the South Bronx and imagined an aquatics center, a velodrome, and hockey fields. "Most people assume that New York City has no spaces available for an Olympics," he said. "This one must be ten to twenty acres, and there are plenty of others." Garvin is the planning director for NYC2008, a privately funded group that is hoping the Big Apple will be chosen to host the twenty-ninth summer Olympic Games. He added, "It's as if I've spent my life preparing for this job."

Garvin is a bushy-browed man with a serious air of puckish enthusiasm. He has lived in New York for most of his fifty-five years, and has been the city's deputy housing commissioner and director of comprehensive planning, as well as a private real-estate developer and a teacher of urban studies at Yale. His 1996 book "The American City: What Works, What Doesn't" is widely regarded as the most thorough of its kind. Among its influential fans is Daniel Doctoroff, a merchant banker, who formed NYC2008 last March, and who recruited Garvin to scout the city for possible Olympic sites.

For the past six months, Garvin, who is in charge of "venue identification," has been inspecting hundreds of parks, vacant lots, and waterfront properties throughout the five boroughs for a proposal that he plans to submit to city officials this summer. Today, Garvin was dashing about in a hired car with two assistants, consulting a clutch of maps as he expertly directed the driver to sites in the Bronx and Queens. Once there, he jumped out of the car like a nomad arriving at an oasis. Among the things he was considering were each site's accessibility, affordability, and potential for an afterlife. Surveying a trash-strewn lot in a derelict section of the Bronx that seemed big enough for anything from archery to volleyball, he scowled and said, "There's no one in the neighborhood who would take care of this site after the Olympics. Too bad. We want to leave a legacy of things that will have a real benefit for the communities."

A few blocks away, Garvin arrived at a high-school sports field. There wasn't much room for extra bleachers, he decided, but the site might do fine as a practice area. A man walked over and introduced himself as the school's sports director. "You know what I'd like to get out of this?" he said. "A new field." Garvin grinned and said, "First, I've got to win."

Boston, Cincinnati, Houston, Seattle, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., are also potential Olympic contenders, and the United States Olympic Committee is expected to choose the American candidate in 1999. For Garvin, this is a New Yorker's moment of truth. "If *everyone* isn't excited about the Olympics," he said, "then we won't get them."

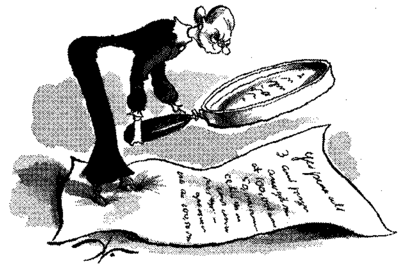
Wouldn't that be just fine with New Yorkers who are worried that the Olympics will make an overcrowded city even worse? Garvin conceded that it might, then pointed out that the subways could be supplemented by increased ferry and rail transportation. "They'd definitely have to get the F.D.R. Drive finished beforehand," one of his assistants quipped. When Garvin was asked whether people might have second thoughts about watching, say, dressage in the Bronx, he grumbled, "The entire Bronx isn't dangerous. We're going to look at the real New York, not 'The Bonfire of the Vanities.' "

The real New York dealt him a blow in Queens, where a site that had looked empty on the map turned out to have a huge discount store on it. Moments later, on the Queensboro Bridge, Garvin, unfazed, said, "Imagine having a diving competition with the Empire State Building in the background, or seeing yachts race around the Statue of Liberty. It's time, I think, to dream a little."

THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST

THEA STEIN LEWINSON has studied the handwriting of leaders from Lincoln to Hitler, as well as many Presidents since Herbert Hoover, but not until last week, when the *Times'* front page featured Bill Clinton's note endorsing White House sleepovers for Democratic fat cats, had she scrutinized the forty-second President's penmanship for clues to his character. Gazing at the memo that Clinton had scribbled two years ago to his staff, with a "cc:" to his advisers Harold Ickes, Leon Panetta, and Billy Webster, she said, pointing at the initial for Panetta's first name, "You see here, this is an 'L,' isn't it? It's as essential as it can be. No squigglies and curls. The school copy for an 'L' is like this"—she methodically wrote down an example of ornate fourth-grade script—"and, instead, he *prints* it. Nothing superficial, you know?" As she studied the *Times*, she mouthed, "Ready . . . to . . . start . . . overnights . . . right . . . away. . . . Give . . . me . . . the . . . top ten . . . list . . . back." Then she observed, "It's good spacing, nice lines, a very well-paced piece of writing. It suggests that he's intelligent and *very* organized. And that he tries to do the important things first."

Although she will turn ninety in April, Lewinson, who is the founding president of the American Society of Professional Graphologists, is still in great demand. The study of her house, in a Washington suburb, is cluttered with industrial-strength magnifying glasses and books with titles like "Die Kunst der Islamischer Kalligraphie" ("The Art of Islamic Calligraphy") and "The Evil of the Mind in Graphic Expression: Handwriting Assessments of Eleven Leading Nazis," which she wrote in 1980. Trained in Germany, she was employed for eighteen years by the C.I.A.



"Nixon's writing," she said, "was very intelligent." Choosing her words carefully, she added, "It was also . . . diplomatic." Bush's handwriting revealed a "decent" man. She could not remember much about Reagan's script, but chuckled when she said of his First Lady, "Nancy's tends to be childish and vain."

And what does the Clinton memo suggest about the current President's character? "To say for sure could take up to eight hours," she said. "But, just glancing at it, the divergence from the school copy is the most important thing. It can mean that he doesn't stick to the rules, which can mean that he's intelligent or that he wants to camouflage things." Could it mean both? Lewinson laughed. "Of course," she said.

THE T WORD

NOT the least of the grievances aired by the members of the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, who have been holed up with their hostages at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima since mid-December, is the language used to describe them. In a communiqué addressed to "national and international public opinion," which was E-mailed to the press on the third day of the crisis, M.R.T.A. (as the group is known in Peru) complained, "We think that to continue with the attitude taken by the government . . . and certain journalists [describing] us as 'assassins and terrorists' in no way contributes to a solution."

Eight days later, M.R.T.A. issued another complaint: "We lament that some political and journalistic personalities insist on labelling us as a terrorist and genocidal band, which is absolutely false, since there are no facts that sustain it." Peru's President Alberto K. Fujimori was not moved, and continued to make a point of using the T word. During a recent trip to Toronto and Washington, he denied that his country was beset by any genuine political agitation, and declared, "What remains are the criminal, isolated, anarchical, disorderly actions by groups claiming to be made of rebels, guerrillas, or revolutionaries." Fujimori understands that in Latin America "rebels," "guerrillas," and "revolutionaries" are romantic figures, and for romantic figures one must make concessions. For its part, the image-conscious M.R.T.A. is anxious to distinguish itself from the indisputably unromantic Shining Path. In Peru, "Shining Path" and "terrorist" are used interchangeably.

In recent communiqués, the scribes in M.R.T.A. have settled on referring to their comrades as "social fighters." Meanwhile, the press has been obliged to pick a term and run with it. Both Reuters and the *Times*, for example, seem to have adopted "guerrillas." A correspondent for National Public Radio says that he uses both "hostage-takers" and "rebels"—preferring the latter because it's easier to say.

GOTTA DANCE

On the eve of the opening of the Irish-dance extravaganza "Lord of the Dance," at Radio City Music Hall, the memoirist Frank McCourt writes:

As a child, I looked on traditional Irish dancing as a grim business: arms stiff at your sides; you're to dance from the hips down and don't be rockin' them ankles. Priests thundered from pulpits on the evils of "foreign" dancing. That jitterbug caused skirts to twirl to ungodly heights, and the waltz, with that touching and holding, provided such an occasion of sin it should be confined to those already in a state of matrimony.

My uncle-by-marriage Pa Keating told me he had it worked out in a nice equation: that the intensity of the Church's opposition to dancing was in direct proportion to how wild it must have been back when it was a spontaneous part of family life. The frenzy of the dancers was so great they'd prance from country kitchens and into fields beyond to cavort so madly that months later girls would begin to "show" and be forced into marriage. But the priests got smart, said Uncle Pa. They had dancing in homes banned and moved it into the parish hall, where they could (a) control it and (b) make money out of it.

In Limerick City in the forties, we sneered at Irish dancing. It was fit only for the sons and daughters of farmers. We flocked to the Lyric Cinema. "Flying Down to Rio," with Fred and Ginger; "Cover Girl," with Gene and Rita. Then, when I was seven, my mother handed me sixpence every Saturday and forced me into a dancing school. I suffered for a few weeks—arms down, look ahead, lift your feet—till I drifted away to spend sixpences at the Lyric and stuff myself with sweets. Of course, I was caught, and that ended my dancing career.

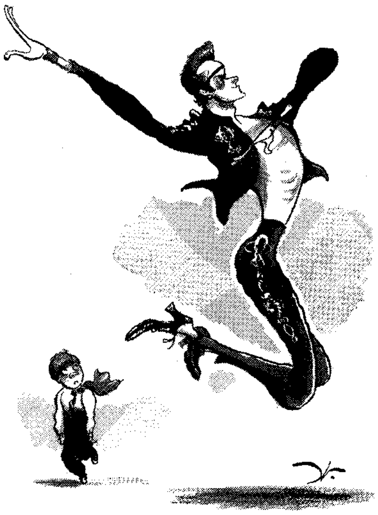
From time to time, I'd see Irish dancing on television or in festivals around New York and sigh over its sameness: "traditional" costumes never seen in ancient Ireland; the absence of fear or joy you see in other folk dancing. Would it ever change?

It did. A couple of years ago a friend sent me a tape of something called "Riverdance." Every year, European countries compete in a song contest, Eurovision, which is seen by three hundred million people. Because the Irish won in 1993 (they win regularly), they were hosts in 1994, and they'd been awarded the "interval act"—something to entertain the crowd while the judges deliberated. For the choreography, the producer had turned to a young Irish-American from Chicago named Michael Flatley, who had won the 1975 World Irish Dancing Championships at seventeen.

What he created was an electrifying seven minutes of Irish dancing the likes of which I'd never seen before. Jean Butler, the lead female dancer—also Irish-American—sailed onstage, dancing the traditional steps. But what was this? Where was the old costume—the blouse, cape, Celtic brooch, tartan skirt? Jean was in a one-piece outfit. It was short. It showed legs. Mother o' God. She raised one hand and touched her hair. And then out came Flatley himself, peeling into view in a loose-sleeved shirt, tight pants, arms extended like wings, strutting and tapping and posturing till you'd have thought he'd learned his stuff from José Greco himself. Jean circled him. She was coy. He talked to her with eyes, shoulders, hips, and, my God, they changed the course of Irish dance. I knew if I could go back in time and dance like them, I'd give up the Lyric and dance till my legs fell off.

Now the name Michael Flatley is up on the marquee at Radio City, and before the opening the young man had time to look back on the road that had got him here. He laughed when I told him I'd heard he was a member of Mensa: they'd once asked him to give a speech, but he'd declined. Yes, he used to box—and, indeed, there's a hint of Cagney in his work. He told me that if he'd grown up in Ireland he could never have made his "breakthrough" in Irish dancing. The streets of Chicago allowed him an edge, he said—a freedom he could not have experienced in the Old Country.

When I asked if there was any great surge of interest in dance back in Ireland, he said that boys were flocking to the schools: it isn't a "sissy" thing anymore.



Was he himself moving away from the Irish tradition entirely? No. While he'd always dance with passion, he wouldn't forget his roots.

I walked down Sixth Avenue thinking of a friend, the actress Geraldine Fitzgerald, and how she'd urged me to listen carefully to the words of an old song:

> O the days of the Kerry dancing,
> O the ring of the piper's tune!
> O for one of those hours of gladness,
> Gone, alas! like our youth, too soon.

I think they're back—the hours of gladness. ♦

"French Twist," Adam Gopnik; "Olympian Scout," Melissa Balmain; "The President's Analyst," Mark Oppenheimer; "The T Word," Jon Miller; "Gotta Dance," Frank McCourt.

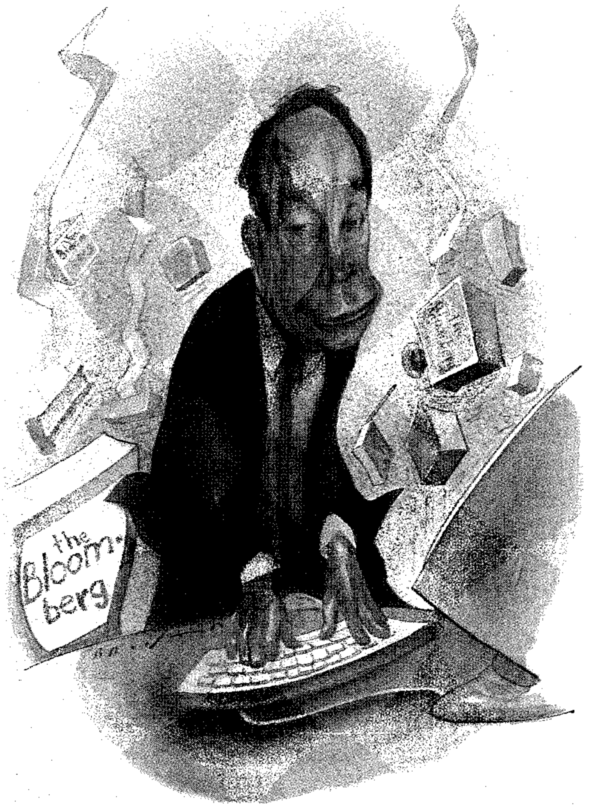
ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE BLOOMBERG THREAT

Why does America's newest media mogul scare Dow Jones?

BY KEN AULETTA

IT'S fabulous being Michael Bloomberg, as he is quick to tell you. His name is stamped on seventy-three thousand computer terminals that companies lease to receive the Bloomberg—a treasure of up-to-the-minute and historical financial data. His seventy news bureaus produce Bloomberg News, which is carried by more than eight hundred newspapers around the world. His name is featured on television (Bloomberg Business News), on radio (Bloomberg News Radio), in magazines (*Bloomberg Magazine* and *Bloomberg Personal*), on the Internet (the Bloomberg Personal Website), and on books (the Bloomberg Press). His company, started fifteen years ago, earned two hundred million dollars last year, Bloomberg says, and according to friends has brought his net worth to about two billion dollars. Without attracting much public notice, Bloomberg not only has snatched away business customers from Dow Jones—and threatened the future of Dow Jones's Telerate unit—but has stealthily attacked the far larger consumer market of news.



"Michael is on a mission now," a friend says. "He realizes he can transform an industry."

STEVE BRODNER

Bloomberg was the keynote speaker this past January at the thirtieth annual Consumer Electronics Show, in Las Vegas, where Gary Shapiro, the president of the sponsoring organization, introduced him as "the William Randolph Hearst of the nineteen-nineties, except for the fact that he is somewhat more ethical perhaps, and kinder and gentler." And, Shapiro added, to laughter from the audience, "Mr. Bloomberg is not only brilliant but, with the recent marriages of John Kennedy and Bill Gates, Mr. Bloomberg is, indisputably, America's most eligible bachelor!" What Shapiro did not say was that Bloomberg, a bachelor by divorce, also fancies himself a bon vivant, who flies his own plane, dives out of helicopters to ski, and—according to Bloomberg—is pursued by gorgeous women.

Bloomberg would not be cast as a leading man: he has pouches under his eyes, is slightly bucktoothed, and has the pleasant but unremarkable demeanor of a five-foot-nine-inch, fifty-five-year-old former Wall Street trader who hurriedly dresses in solemn gray or blue suits. His speech in Las Vegas, which was unscripted, revealed much about the way he thinks, and that in turn reveals reasons for his success.

Bloomberg is a former engineer, but he cautioned his audience not to become infatuated by technology. He had just re-

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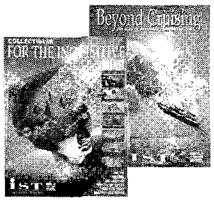

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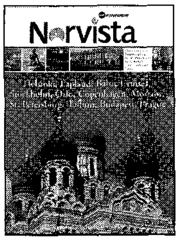

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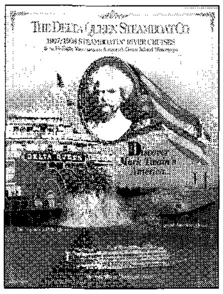
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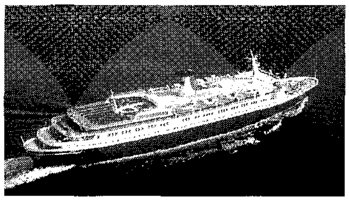

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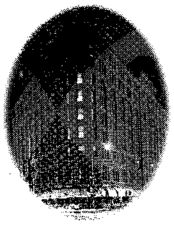

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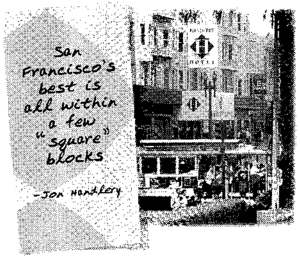

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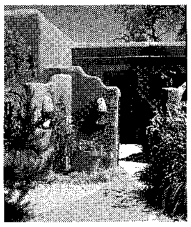

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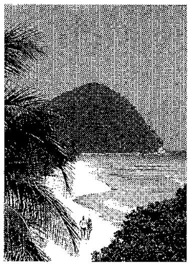

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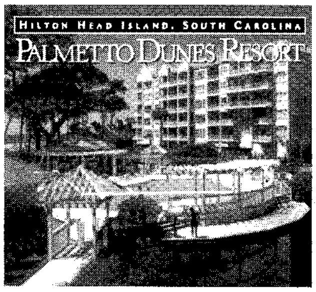

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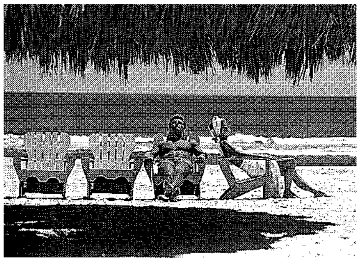

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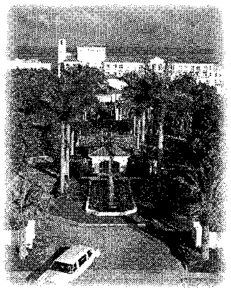

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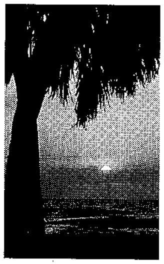

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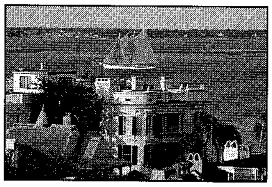

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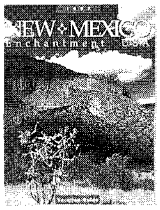

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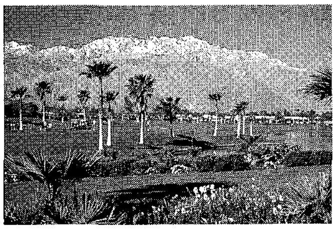

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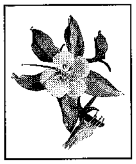

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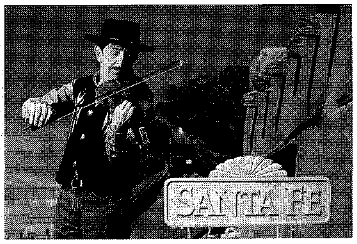

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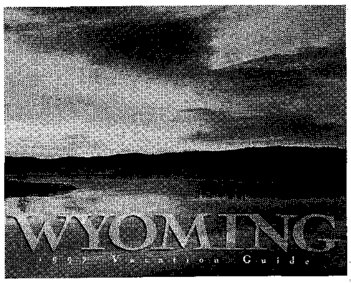

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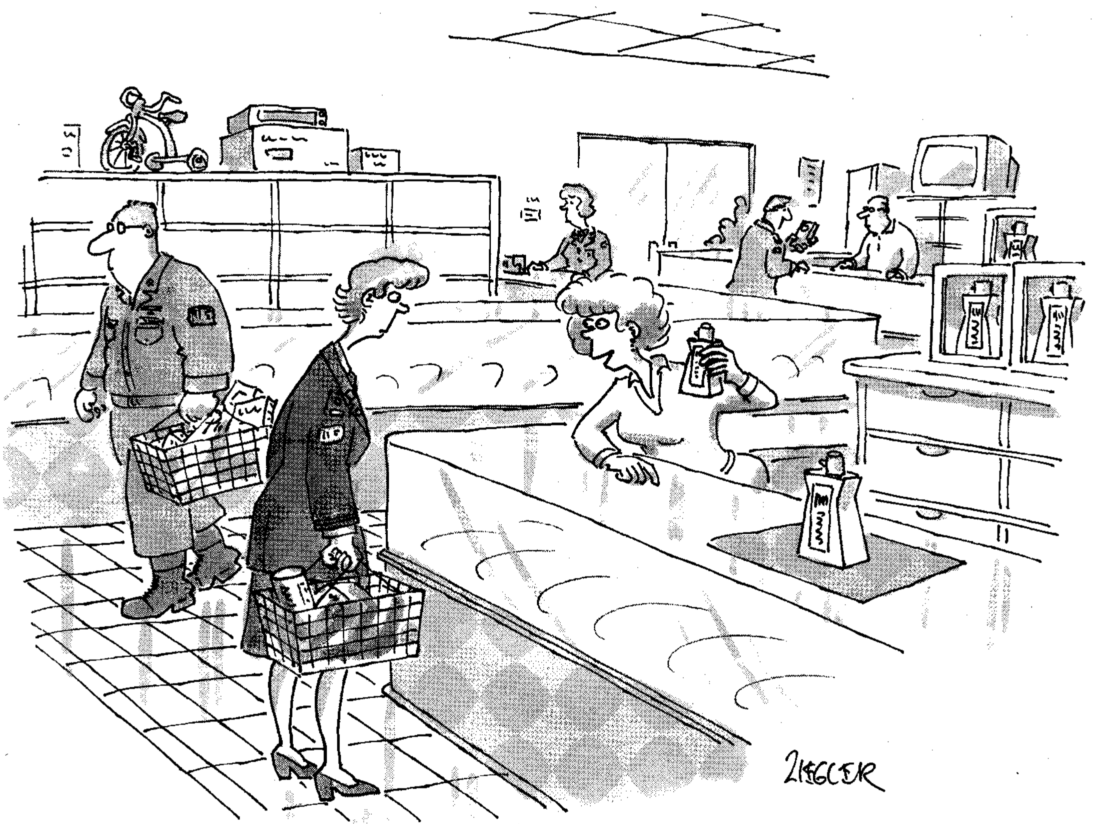

"It's that bold new fragrance from Uncle Sam—Misconduct."

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turned from skiing in Vail, where the hot product was not a consumer gadget—not a new laptop, a new personal digital assistant, a new mouse, all featured at the show—but bottled water. The point: specialized skills will matter less and less, and a liberal-arts education more and more. "We are making a terrible mistake in our school systems in trying to teach kids technology at the expense of reading and writing and getting along with each other," he told a ballroom full of exhibitors. Context, that is to say, matters more than expertise.

Listen to the customer, Bloomberg advised the exhibitors. As a trading-floor partner who designed and ran Salomon Brothers' computer and information-retrieval system, Bloomberg said that his first mission was to understand the customer. He wondered whether this mission was too often neglected. His evidence: "All of you people keep producing devices where the letters and numbers are much too small for me to read, and the buttons are too small for my big fingers." The products are designed by engineers who think too much of their own brilliance and too little about what customers need, he said. "If there's one thing I worry about in my organization, it's that we're going to think that we're smarter than these other people are."

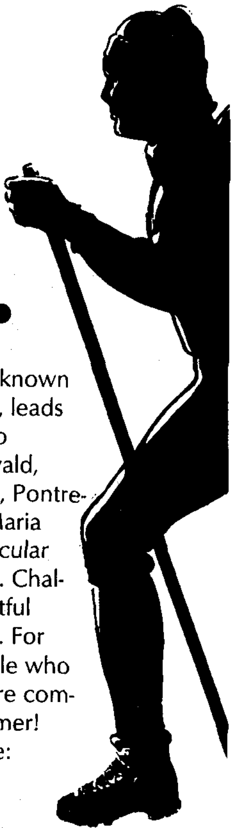
The Bloomberg organization starts with the Bloomberg machine, a dedicated computer and color-coded keyboard, which is leased to companies for eleven hundred and ninety dollars a month. It generates real-time worldwide pricing of bonds, stocks, commodities, currencies, money markets, and mortgages, and it also breaks news and provides data, including filings of the Securities and Exchange Commission, stretching as far back as ten years. It includes "what if" scenarios that allow clients to compute the returns on alternative investments. It takes data and transforms them into a series of charts, which reveal, for example, how a company's stock has performed versus the market over the past five years, or the pattern of a company's dividends over, say, the past seven years.

If a Wall Street trader or a prospective investor wants information on a company, Bloomberg computer's data library analyzes sixty-five thousand corporations, using eight hundred separate categories of information. It allows clients to sell or buy stocks and bonds, or to buy airline tickets. There is an audio bank of radio news. In the upper-right-hand corner of each screen, a video report offers either Bloomberg news or access to a video vault ranging from Senate hearings, through press conferences, to interviews by Charlie Rose, whose program is produced at a studio in Bloomberg's headquarters, on Park Avenue. All this information is punched into the computer system by an army of nine hundred employees in Princeton, New Jersey.

Bloomberg "is the fox of the financial-services business," says NBC's president, Robert Wright, who is building a worldwide business-news service through CNBC. Wright observes that Bloomberg has a built-in advantage: "He is not a public company, so he doesn't have to show a profit. He keeps coming and coming . . . and his box is known as the best in the information industry."

MICHAEL BLOOMBERG has always understood that information is power. "Everyone talks about multimedia and interactivity," Louis V. Eccleston, who runs Bloomberg's sales force, says. "That's what we've been doing since we started this business." The combination of new technology and new services like Bloomberg's and those of his two principal competitors—Reuters and Telerate—has helped democratize Wall Street. By providing more information, they free customers from relying solely on investment advisers or banks.

Among the three major competitors, Bloomberg, the newest entrant in this market, trails. During the third quarter of 1996, according to the newsletter *Electronic Information Report*, Reuters had three hundred and forty thousand two hundred customers, Telerate an estimated ninety-four thousand five hundred, and Bloomberg sixty-five thousand. But Bloomberg has the momentum. The number of subscribers he claimed in



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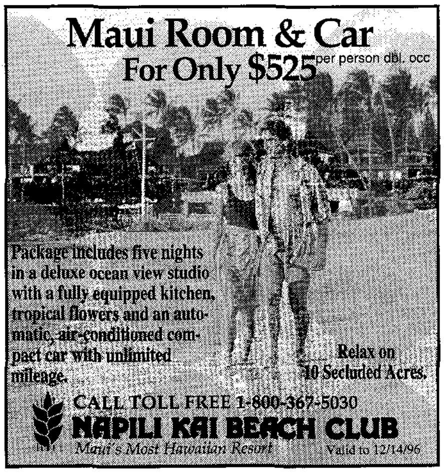

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this period jumped more than eighteen per cent since the end of 1995, while Reuters' subscribers grew four per cent and Telerate's fell an estimated four per cent.

"We don't use anything other than Bloomberg," says James Singleton, of the Cypress Group, an equity investment company with a private capital pool of a billion dollars. "I always found the other ones harder to manipulate. If I'm looking at a company we're thinking of making an investment in, I can get the information I need without having to reveal my initial interest to an investment bank."

The Bloomberg terminal is geared to a specialty market and generates, according to its creator, ninety-seven per cent of his company's billion dollars in revenues. The size of this market is estimated to reach between ten and twenty billion dollars by the year 2000. "But the potential," Bloomberg says, "is everything else"—the consumer market. "My strategy is to build a worldwide network of serious news"—in print, on television, on radio, and on-line.

Bloomberg already has three thousand employees, a number he says will swell to four thousand by the end of the year. He is creeping up on the newspapers that carry his news wire, the same way he crept up on Telerate. In January, without making an announcement or otherwise attracting notice, he changed the credit line of the news service from Bloomberg Business News to Bloomberg News. He also expanded into covering sports and politics. Since 1993, he has bought a daily cartoon from the Cartoon Bank (a company recently acquired by *The New Yorker*). He is currently working out plans with the Mirror Group, as the *Observer* in London reported in January, to launch a daily financial newspaper that could compete with the *Financial Times*. Bloomberg refuses to confirm this, but he surely knows that as he expands from the specialty market to the consumer market the competition thickens.

"There is absolutely no reason we can't do as well as CNN and NBC," he asserts. "There is no resource they have that we don't have. Don't forget, we have five hundred journalists. Admittedly, not all of them are good on television. But we have seventy bureaus. Who else has seventy bureaus?" Actually, Reuters has a hundred and sixty-one. Robert Wright, of NBC, suggests that Bloomberg is just bloviating. "What he's done to date I don't see as threatening," he says.

It is, rather, to his immediate business competitors that Bloomberg poses a real threat, and Bloomberg—who says that in ten years he expects to be "what Dow Jones used to be"—has focussed on Dow Jones & Co. and, in particular, on the *Wall Street Journal*, which he would love to own. According to an analysis of Dow Jones—produced in an instant from a Bloomberg terminal—the total cash common dividend jumped three hundred and seventy-three per cent from 1990 to 1995, while the company's R. & D. expenditures dropped eighteen per cent and its earnings reinvested in the business plunged a hundred and twenty-seven per cent. Joseph Nocera has reported in *Fortune* that some members of the Bancroft family, which controls the voting stock of the company, are unhappy with its dwindling profit margins and its stock performance. To try to placate the family, Bloomberg and others say, Dow Jones has increased its dividend payments even as its earnings declined, but that increase has starved Telerate of investment money.

Not surprisingly, predators are circling. The hedge-fund manager Michael Price, who in 1995 made a nifty fortune when he helped prod Chase Manhattan Bank into merging with Chemical, announced in January that he had acquired four and a half million shares of Dow Jones, or just under five per cent. James Cramer, another hedge-fund manager, disclosed that he now owned a million shares. One corporate giant that covets Dow Jones is General Electric, which owns NBC. "There is an opportunity for G.E. if we could be a white knight for the company with the family," an important G.E. executive told me. "But it would work for G.E. only if Dow Jones should become a more profit-driven company." This executive speculates that G.E. could buy a twenty-to-twenty-five-per-cent stake, and then link the Dow Jones news operations with NBC, CNBC, and the joint Microsoft/NBC effort, MSNBC. But, this executive makes clear, G.E. would want to see Dow Jones sell Telerate.

So would Cramer, who believes that the subsidiary depresses the stock price of the parent company. "I think the franchise—the *Wall Street Journal*, *Smart Money*, and its book publishing—is worth twice what the stock price is now," he said the other day. Dow Jones, which traded at fifty-six dollars a share in 1987, now trades in the high thirties, despite the biggest rise in the stock market's history.

To protect itself, the Dow Jones company—like the *Times*, the Washington *Post*, and Reuters—has a mechanism to repel sharks. Voting power is vested in the family, which controls a majority of the stock; in the case of Reuters, a trust has super-voting rights. Peter Job, the C.E.O. of Reuters, like Peter Kann, the chairman and C.E.O. of Dow Jones, is a former journalist for whom phrases like "the public trust" are as vital as "shareholder value." As Job puts it, a company "like Reuters is very heavily reliant on and totally dedicated to impartial behavior."

Nevertheless, Kann knows that the Dow Jones shareholders are restive. Recently, he met with NBC's Wright to discuss a joint venture. According to an NBC official, Wright, looking at his vulnerability—overseas business news—proposed that they join forces "outside the U.S." Kann, however, according to a well-placed Dow Jones source, wanted to focus on his company's weakest point—television business news and distribution inside the United States—and proposed that they "weave together the resources" of the business-news operations of the Dow Jones New York television station and CNBC's national cable business-news channel. With neither party wanting to dilute its strength, they parted amicably. But word of G.E.'s interest has obviously spread. When I asked the garrulous James Cramer about it, he said sharply, "I have no interest in commenting on that."

A natural buyer for Telerate might be Bloomberg. Bloomberg said recently that he would not come close to paying the billion six hundred million dollars that Dow Jones paid when it acquired Telerate. He also said he thinks that one day soon the family will "start screaming," and added, "My job is to sit back and wait."

"Michael is on a mission now," says his close friend Morris W. Offit, who founded the Offit Bank and was a fellow-partner at Salomon Brothers. "He realizes he can transform an industry. It's very rare in life that you have that opportunity. . . . He definitely wants to be king of the media. And he's coming at it through the back door."

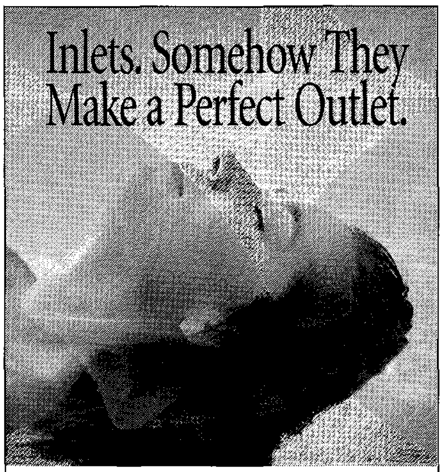
MICHAEL BLOOMBERG is the son of a Boston bookkeeper who never earned more than six thousand dollars a year. His mother was a strong-willed housewife, who dominated the household, insisting that the family gather for dinner. To this day, the son phones his mother, who is eighty-eight, the first thing each morning from work. "When she says that I should do something and I don't do it, I have a sort of guilty feeling," he says.

Michael attended public schools and worked his way up to Eagle Scout, collecting every merit badge he could. In high school, he worked part time for a Cambridge electronics company, and in 1960 he enrolled as an engineering student at Johns Hopkins, in Baltimore, paying his tuition with a National Defense college loan.

For the first three years, he was a C student. "What I really liked doing—and what I was good at—was dealing with people," he writes in "Bloomberg by Bloomberg," a forthcoming autobiography. "I became president of my fraternity, president of the Inter-Fraternity Council, class president, and all-around Big Man on Campus." From Johns Hopkins he went to the Harvard Business School, and there, too, he was an average student, graduating in 1966.

Flat feet kept Bloomberg out of the Army, and he took a job at Salomon Brothers, regarding it as a place where a kid from a blue-collar background could rise on merit. He thought that he, like everyone else, including senior partners, would eventually have a desk and a phone on the trading-room floor. However, he had an apprenticeship to serve. His first job was in "the Cage": there he counted bond and stock certificates by hand, sent them to banks as collateral for overnight loans, and, when the banks returned the certificates the next morning, registered them in the firm's inventory. His second job was in the purchase-and-sales department, and there he leafed through stacks of *Wall Street Journals* to find historical stock prices, or went through piles of paper searching for stock-ownership lists. Wall Street was drowning in paper, and during the late sixties the New York Stock Exchange closed on Wednesdays to catch up on paperwork. More than a few firms went under. Eventually, Michael Bloomberg joined the equities department, and became part of a new effort to trade stocks, like bonds, in bulk.

Serendipity played a role in Bloomberg's upward trajectory at Salomon. Arriving at the office each morning at seven o'clock, he was the second to appear, af-



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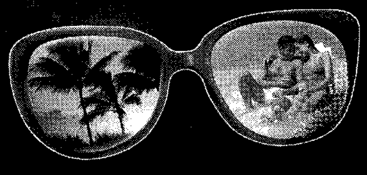

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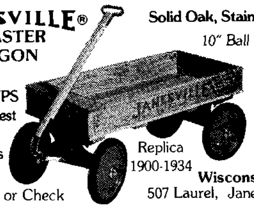

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A strawberry shortcake sits breathing sweetness on a cloud
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phone books piled on a wobbly chair until the dull silver
radiator looms, then a trickle and someone saying
cracked open. Am I dead? Am I an egg? I hatch out,
bandaged under grapevines near a gullyful of trash.
The wooden lawn chair knits splinters into the backs of my
knees and I will get no shortcake. Am I downcast or
defiant? This and so much else I reach for is gone—
the color of the bulkhead being painted,
the kind of sandwiches my mother hands the splattered
churchmen, and does she know she's pretty?
Rotten apples on spring ground are smeary bittersweet
and I am the age of my daughter who still loves fog.
I hate it. The way last month's huge sadnesses and tiny
triumphs are leaking onto her pillow as she sleeps,
and who knows which moments will get snagged and remain
to point to who she's become once she's forgotten
the rest, her right foot asleep and her daughter
gap-mouthed below her wide with the world.

—ELLEN WATSON

ter Billy Salomon, the firm's managing partner. "When he needed to borrow a match or talk sports, I was the only other one in the trading room, so he talked to me," Bloomberg writes. "Woody Allen once said that eighty per cent of life is showing up. I believe that."

Bloomberg was made a partner in 1972, and later worked in the fixed-income department. He was a controversial figure. Traders tend to be impatient, demanding quick answers: buy or sell, yes or no. Bloomberg was more impatient than most, and his temper led him to smash more than a few telephones. He agitated for the firm to automate its Dickensian paper system, and in the early seventies he prevailed upon Salomon to install computers at the desks of all traders and to connect these work stations to an I.B.M. mainframe computer. He came to understand that if Salomon had the best information, it would make the best trades.

Bloomberg urged young software programmers to devise ways to deliver that information. One of them—Thomas Secunda, who was then a twenty-four-year-old Ph.D. candidate in mathematics and today oversees Bloomberg's R. & D. efforts—recalled, "When I started on Wall Street, in 1979, two types of computing were done." The back office and the salesmen worked on terminals, but they didn't interact. Salesmen, if they were asked for a bond yield, didn't have the information in their computer, so they had to look it up in a book or use a calculator. "What Mike discovered is: Why not use the tools we have and become interactive?" Secunda said. "All the traders loved us. It freed them—liberated them!"

But the man who today extolls the importance of human relationships had poisoned relationships with many of his partners. "I was very vocal that we were going in the wrong direction," Bloomberg recalls. When the firm announced in 1981 that it had been bought by the Philbro Corporation, a commodities-trading giant, Bloomberg was one of about half a dozen partners who were not invited to stay: "They threw me out after fifteen years." But Morris Offit thinks that Bloomberg probably desired this outcome. "He developed at Salomon's equity desk the genesis for a business, and nobody at Salomon was acute or alert enough to recognize this," Offit says.

Bloomberg cashed out his partnership, and, he says, netted more than ten million dollars. That gave him the capital to start his own firm, and he had an idea about customizing information. As a former trader in stocks and bonds, he understood the needs of customers, and, as an engineer, he understood the technology. He invested three hundred thousand dollars, opened a one-room office, and hired three Salomon protégés—Tom Secunda to create the analytics, Duncan MacMillan to learn customers' needs, and Chuck Zegar to create the software. (The three remain with Bloomberg and are the only employees to have a small equity stake in the company.) Then Bloomberg searched for partners. He arranged to pitch Merrill Lynch & Company's capital-markets chief, Ed Moriarty.

They met in a boardroom filled with Merrill Lynch lawyers, traders, computer programmers, and others. Bloomberg had arrived alone. He told them that the machine he would offer their traders was just about ready for delivery. He promised that to help them select investments he could offer a "what if" scenario analysis of their stock or bond portfolios, and a yield-curve analysis that would be updated instantly, along with graphs of the futures market as it changed, plus he would track every transaction and instantly mark their trading positions to market, plus there would be a secure E-mail system to communicate with customers, suppliers, and co-workers. No one else offered these features.

When a Merrill Lynch executive said that the company could build the same system, Bloomberg offered to do the job in six months—with Merrill Lynch under no obligation to buy the system if it fell short. Moriarty naturally accepted the offer.

Bloomberg invested four million dollars of his own capital in a crash program, and he won his gamble. Merrill Lynch ordered twenty terminals. (Eventually, the company ordered a thousand.) Merrill Lynch also decided to invest thirty million dollars for thirty-per-cent ownership of Innovative Market Systems, the name Bloomberg gave his new company. Dan Tully, who was then a member of the executive committee and later became chairman and C.E.O. of Merrill Lynch, recalls, "We believed he had the analytics and he was focussed and he was very entrepreneurial—and it would enhance our thrust into fixed-income markets. Merrill was not a player in capital markets then." As part of the arrangement, Bloomberg agreed to a five-year moratorium on the sale of his service to any of Merrill Lynch's fourteen major competitors. And, Bloomberg recalls, he pocketed twenty-four million dollars. (The partnership continues, though altered slightly. Last December, Merrill sold a third of its original ownership position back to Bloomberg for two hundred million dollars.)

Other clients followed—the Bank of England, the Vatican, the World Bank, the Federal Reserve—but after two years Bloomberg realized that he wanted those fourteen major competitors. He went to Merrill Lynch to plead his case, and Tully overruled his own traders, who wanted to keep the proprietary system to themselves. "I felt that clients ultimately did not want a Bloomberg-Merrill Lynch machine on their desks," he recalls.

It was at about this time that the product, and the company, gained a new name: Bloomberg. No one had to twist Mike Bloomberg's arm; in his autobiography he writes of the "desire to see one's name in print."

BLOOMBERG'S business life has been marked by a longing for more, and that longing led to his association with Matthew Winkler. Winkler had been a *Wall Street Journal* reporter who covered the securities industry, and in 1988 he teamed up with the technology writer Michael Miller to write about Bloomberg. In 1987, when Winkler had been asked to help edit a new financial section, the *Journal's* bond tables were supplied exclusively by Bloomberg. "It bothered me," Winkler recalls. Why didn't the *Journal* run bond prices and yields from its own Telerate? Not that executives at Telerate ever complained. They were, he sensed, too smug to notice. The more Winkler poked around and explored the two systems, the more certain he became that Bloomberg was about to eat Dow Jones's lunch. Winkler and Miller wrote a front-page story about how Bloomberg was waging a successful guerrilla war against his larger competitors.

At that time, the Bloomberg service did not supply text or news, as Telerate and Reuters did. Now, however, Bloomberg, to avoid his company's becoming marginalized as a niche service, had to expand his definition of information; and, to be the only box on a client's desk, he had to attack Dow Jones where it was strongest—in news. A year after the *Journal* story appeared, he invited Winkler

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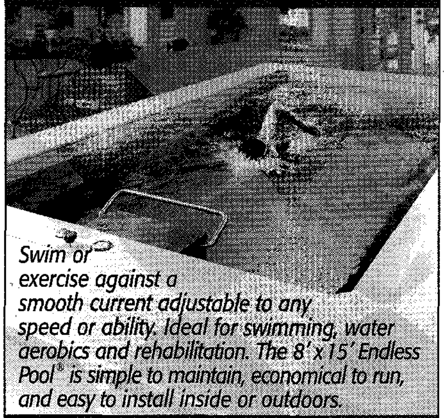

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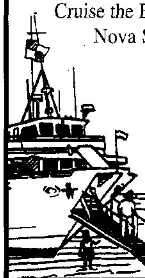

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to lunch, and after talking for hours he asked Winkler to build him a news service. Startled, Winkler said he needed to think about it. Winkler became Bloomberg's four hundred and fifty-fifth employee.

It took Dow Jones a year and a half to realize that Bloomberg, who was a subscriber to its news service, was aiming for its throat. In August of 1990, Dow Jones announced the cancellation of its contracts with Bloomberg, and, by reporting the fact on its news wire and in the *Journal*, provided Bloomberg with free publicity. Bloomberg and Winkler accelerated the expansion of their news staff. Unlike the providers of other services, Bloomberg offered his free, stipulating only that a newspaper print the credit line "Bloomberg Business News." He also provided a free terminal, first to the *Times* and then to most other major newspapers, calculating that he would get more out of the exchange in free publicity and credibility than it would cost. By 1995, Bloomberg boasts, his news service was carried "in more American newspapers than any other news service, after the A.P."

In the early nineties, Bloomberg was also longing to expand into radio and television—an idea broached by Jonathan Fram, an executive of the Financial News Network (FNN). Fram suggested that Bloomberg bid against Dow Jones and NBC to buy FNN, but Bloomberg said that he built businesses, he didn't buy them. Fram persisted, so Bloomberg hired him to help build a business. (Meanwhile, NBC outbid Dow Jones, and merged FNN into CNBC, which is now a lucrative cable business-news network.)

Bloomberg and Fram's first foray, in 1992, was to spend thirteen and a half million dollars to acquire WNEW, a New York City radio station that featured songs by Frank Sinatra and Judy Garland. Bloomberg dropped this format, substituted business and hard news, and gave the station new call letters, WBBR. Once again, Bloomberg used computer technology to shape his product and reduce costs. He quickly realized that he could build a radio network with a single computerized, digitized radio station and without buying a distribution system—that WBBR could feed (for a fee or a portion of ad revenues) Bloomberg Business News reports to stations across America. And Bloomberg discovered that his New York AM radio station, though its audience shrank by two-thirds after he changed the call letters, was nevertheless able to promote the Bloomberg brand name. Today, a hundred and twenty-five radio stations subscribe to Bloomberg Business News.

Television was Bloomberg's next venture; after all, the same workstation that permits a reporter to write, record, edit, and produce pieces for radio lends itself, with the addition of a robotic camera, to television. He began producing a daily two-hour news program for the USA Network; produced a daily half-hour business show for PBS stations; invited PBS to produce from his headquarters studio both "The Charlie Rose Show" and "Adam Smith's Money World"; and provided a twenty-four-hour news service, Bloomberg Information Television, for satellite television here and—in French, Japanese, Italian, Spanish—around the world. His eventual goal, Bloomberg says, is twenty-four-hour local and international news everywhere, produced in the local language and by local talent.

One day, not long ago, I stood with Jonathan Fram as he looked at rows of computer workstations and robotic cameras at Bloomberg's headquarters. "You could call this the assembly line of content providers," Fram observed. "The reporter is the reporter, the producer, the writer, the editor, and the creative talent. His reports go right to the transmitter, right to the Internet. It takes out all the infrastructure."

The process is cost-efficient, but it removes the check-and-balance function performed by an editor or a producer, who presses a reporter to provide more sources, to make another phone call to check a fact. Matt Winkler, who is an unabashed Bloomberg fan and helped him write his book, reluctantly admits to "some discomfort" over the fact that editors on the TV and radio side of the news operation have been rendered superfluous. He is not surprised, though. He recalls, "The first thing Bloomberg said to me when I came was 'What do we need editors for?' " In the case of the wire service, Winkler prevailed, but, he confessed, "TV and radio is Mike Bloomberg's baby."

Bloomberg could use a check and a balance. Although he claims he would never pressure a reporter on behalf of a friend, he says he would call to get a friend's book promoted. And, as an active Democrat, he continues to make contributions to Democratic candidates and to such moderate Republicans as New York's Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. In fact, he admits to a somewhat immodest desire to go into government himself. "If I ever ran, it would be for a job in the executive branch of government—mayor, governor, or president," he writes in his memoir. "I think I'd be great in any of these three executive jobs that mirror my experience. (Those wanting competent government needn't worry. I have no current plans to enter the public arena.)"

Bloomberg's activism extends to philanthropy. "I don't think he respects people who make millions of dollars and don't give back to society," Patricia Harris, who oversees Bloomberg's charitable effort, observes, and Bloomberg says, "I've never met Ted Turner, but I'm predisposed to like him because he gives away money." Bloomberg says he derived this attitude from his father, who always contributed to the N.A.A.C.P., and encouraged his son to become a Cub Scout to help the elderly to the polls on Election Day. Bloomberg succeeded Morris Offit as the chairman of the board of Johns Hopkins, and flies his helicopter to Baltimore to spend an average of one day each week there. Bloomberg has pledged to give fifty-five million dollars over five years to the university. And last year, according to Bloomberg, he gave away thirty-five million dollars. He says he intends to give away before he dies what Offit estimates to be a two-billion-dollar fortune. "If you give it away before you die, you get enormous pleasure," Bloomberg says. "And you get a chance to see the money used as you wanted."

Otherwise, Bloomberg's private life is filled with a routine of work, dinner parties, and family—his two teen-age daughters and his former wife, Susan. Bloomberg and his ex-wife have established relationships with others, yet to this day he refers to her as his closest confidante. People find that strange, but even stranger is his incessant talk about attractive women he has never met—such as the actress Sharon Stone. It is locker-room chatter, but without the prurience. He does not much enjoy movies, the theatre, or television. "I fundamentally don't like watching other people do things," he says.

STEPPING off the elevator into the Bloomberg offices, on the fifteenth floor of 499 Park Avenue, one is immediately engulfed in a traffic jam. People race from a glassed-in newsroom, where they all have identical desks and roughly four feet of space, to a central mall, where there is free fruit, vegetables, coffee, sodas, cereal, salads, and candy, and on to a central staircase leading to the nine other floors that constitute Bloomberg's headquarters. There are no walled offices, no job titles, no dress code, no executive dining rooms, no exceptions to the rule that everyone wears an I.D. tag with the person's first name printed boldly. One can peer into any of the glassed-in conference rooms, including a tiny one behind Michael Bloomberg's small desk in the newsroom.

There is an idea behind the commotion. "I came from Salomon," Bloomberg explains. "Everyone that mattered sat in that trading room. Everyone took off their jacket and had the same desk." Bloomberg is striving to create a culture, which he describes this way: "Very egalitarian. Very little bureaucracy. A meritocracy. A compassionate one." Every employee receives a revenue-sharing bonus based on the growth of the company, a bonus that, when it is coupled with salary hikes, has averaged, according to Bloomberg, more than twenty per cent each year.

For all Bloomberg's ventures into new mass-market media, the heart of his business remains the Bloomberg. His competitors, fully aware that the Bloomberg, with its extensive analytical and historical resources, sets the pace in this specialty market, have been attempting to catch up. "This is the reason we have had nine hundred people in Princeton for ten years," Bloomberg said. "If you could just buy it, I would have. The hardest thing to duplicate in our company is the Princeton operation. The data-collection people are analysts," which is to say that they are not clerks.

First Reuters and, more recently, Telerate have promised their customers the kind of information that was first provided by Bloomberg. "I would agree with you that we have not been sufficiently

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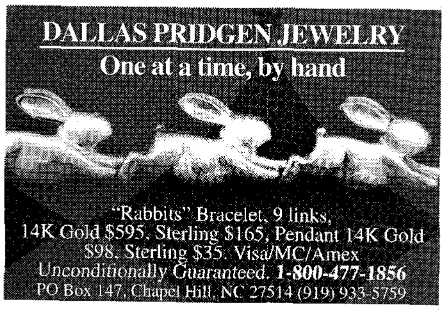

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strong in analytics," the Reuters C.E.O., Peter Job, says. The Reuters 3000 series, introduced in June of 1996, offers customers not just real-time quotes and news but the kind of historical and comparative information common on a Bloomberg.

Still, Reuters remains the clear market leader: it is the strongest company in generating data on the currencies and interest rates of countries around the globe, and is also the strongest on the stocks of overseas companies. Reuters has other advantages as well. It is big (five billion dollars in revenues) and profitable (a billion ninety million dollars). The British-based company, now a hundred and forty-six years old, employs nearly two thousand journalists in a hundred and sixty-one news bureaus around the world, and nearly half of them provide TV news reports.

As for Telerate, in addition to its link to the Dow Jones news wire and the *Wall Street Journal*, its strength has traditionally included providing up-to-the-minute Treasury-bond prices through an exclusive arrangement with Cantor Fitzgerald, the nation's largest bond broker. I asked Kenneth L. Burenga, the president and No. 2 official of Dow Jones—and the acting chief executive officer of Telerate—how he would sell his service to a prospective customer. At first, Burenga invoked the sum—six hundred and fifty million dollars—that the board had just voted to improve Telerate's service, and only then did he cite its current advantages. "We have an offering of proprietary news and information you can't get anywhere else," he said. Since Telerate, like Reuters, collects more information on more markets than Bloomberg—including information supplied by two thousand banks and exchanges and more than two thousand other providers—he said that it offers "one-stop service." And he added, "It is Dow Jones," invoking an organization that is worldwide, that owns business newspapers and magazines, and that produces TV business-news programs. "We do something no one else does," Burenga said. "Others only do pieces."

Telerate, however, suffers from real disadvantages, as its chairman and C.E.O., Peter Kann, acknowledged last December, when he publicly proclaimed Telerate's results "disappointing." Only recently has Telerate offered historical data on companies and on financial transactions to compete with Bloomberg's data, which go back ten years, or Reuters', which go back five years or more. Customers complain that they cannot use Telerate's service to trade securities or perform complicated financial analysis. The Schroder Wertheim & Company analyst Michael W. Ellmann cracks that some say "even God couldn't fix it," and adds, "I would bet God could fix it." But, short of divine intervention, Ellmann is pessimistic about Telerate's ability to halt its slide.

In spending millions of dollars to fix Telerate, Dow Jones is making an assumption that the analytics and the historical data that Bloomberg has collected are easy to purchase—"generic information," as Burenga labels it. Burenga's argument has some holes. He claims that these data are generic but that information from the Dow Jones service is "proprietary," because it relies on good editors and the context they provide—exactly the argument that Bloomberg and Job make on behalf of their data. And Telerate, by investing millions of dollars to improve its software as well as its data, implicitly accepts the notion that the company needs to do far more than buy generic information. Furthermore, Dow Jones appears to assume that its competitors will stand still. "We will increase our R. & D. spending by more than six hundred and fifty million dollars in the next three years. That's just the increase!" Bloomberg says, adding that he now spends about seventy-five million dollars annually on R. & D. and about a hundred and fifty million dollars to maintain the Princeton operation. Reuters reports that it spent three hundred and forty-three million dollars on R. & D. last year alone, for all its products, and this included two hundred and fifty million dollars to improve the Reuters 3000, the product that takes aim at Bloomberg. So far, the most momentous change Telerate has made is to change its name—to Dow Jones Markets, which it announced last week.

Of course, Bloomberg has his own problems. His sales overseas lag behind those of Reuters and Telerate. "If you're overseas, we're way ahead," Burenga says. "Bloomberg is unheard of in Asia." Among customers interested in foreign exchange, he says, Reuters

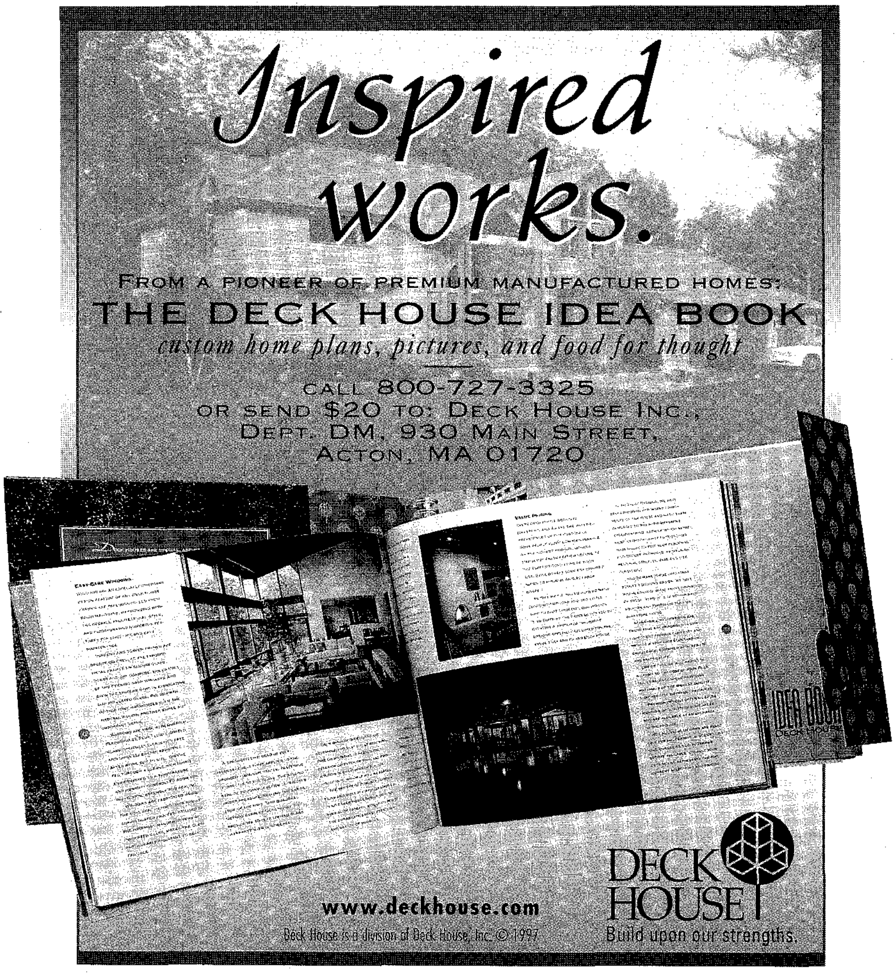
"All right, Ms. Ramsey, send in the clones."

claims three-quarters of this market and Telerate the rest. The most serious weakness of Bloomberg's system is that Bloomberg insists on retaining control of it: customers can't combine Telerate, Reuters, and Bloomberg data. Nor can customers incorporate Bloomberg data into, say, their own trading models. By contrast, Job says, "Reuters has for some time been delivering all its products on standard computers." Bloomberg, he says, is invested in the hardware business. In an era of "open systems," where companies like Apple and Microsoft learned that they had to open their platforms, Bloomberg's remains closed. "You can't in this world brand a machine," Job says. "Machines come and go. A box can't be a brand." In addition, he says, no customer wants to rely on one vender. "The customer has to be empowered by an open platform." He also believes that many customers want one computer and keyboard on their desk, not two.

Bloomberg has recently relaxed his stricture that customers lease his terminal. Now, under what he calls "open Bloomberg," customers can get his data on their own computers, but they are still required to use a separate Bloomberg keyboard. "I don't like the open idea, because I lose control," Bloomberg says. He'd be happy to get out of the hardware business, he says, but he doesn't want to offer his analytics unless you buy the whole system.

Still, Michael Bloomberg is, at heart, a capitalist, not a zealot. "As things change, I will give in and change," he says. His business model is predicated on certain assumptions: that his data are not generic, and therefore can't be easily replicated; that his closed system will not be threatened by the spread of the Internet; and, finally, that he will not be threatened by technological advances. If Bloomberg has bet wrong on these, he loses.

Bloomberg seems unfazed. "In my heart of hearts, there's no competition," he says, sounding as self-assured as a Telerate—or, better, a Quotron—executive must have sounded a decade ago. "I'll have to work very hard to screw this one up. We're way ahead in the critical-mass business with technology. It's very hard to play catch-up ball. It's very hard to kill momentum. Once you have momentum, it's not like one Hail Mary pass will change it." ♦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POSTSCRIPT

MS. ULYSSES

Emily Hahn's lifetime of reporting and vivid adventure kept her happily out of touch with convention.

BY ROGER ANGELL

"NOBODY said not to go," begins Emily Hahn's 1937 Reporter at Large piece "Round Trip to Nanking," and so, at the outset of the singularly bloody and dangerous Sino-Japanese War, she got on a train in Shanghai and went, carrying an evening dress tucked inside a hatbox. "There were young men, dinner parties, and dancing in Nanking," she offers by way of explanation. In 1932, after spending a year in the Belgian Congo, she determined, "with my usual sublime self-confidence," to walk out, via elephant trail to Lake Kivu and thence all the way to the East African coast, accompanied by a baby baboon named Angélique and a pygmy guide. "Like all pygmies," she wrote, "he was incapable of getting lost." Her surprising first-person piece "The Big Smoke," about opium (her own opium smoking, I mean), begins, "Though I'd always wanted to be an opium addict, I can't claim that as the reason I went to China." Actually, she went for the weekend, to drop in on an old friend, and stayed for nine years—a reasonable turn of events, to hear her tell it.

At twenty-five, poised for departure to the Congo, Emily Hahn fixed a confident gaze on a future stuffed with the unexpected.

CAFFYN AND CLAY/CAMERA PORTRAITS

Hahn, who died two weeks ago, at the age of ninety-two, was this magazine's roving heroine, our Belle Geste: a reporter inveterately at large, whose work, arriving from all continents, encompassed a hundred and eighty-one pieces and eight decades. Her datelines, taken together with her striking good looks—enormous, green-flecked dark eyes; an oval face; a plungingly intelligent gaze; and a generous mouth always on the edge of an arriving smile or giggle—are misleading, suggesting another trenchcoated, news-hungry gal reporter among the guys, a Jean Arthur; or perhaps a beautiful, thrill-seeking flibbertigibbet, a Carole Lombard. She was, in truth, something rare: a woman deeply, almost domestically, at home in the world. Driven by curiosity and energy, she went there and did that, and then wrote about it without fuss. Her pieces from the thirties and forties switch effortlessly between the Reporter at Large configuration and the offhand, first-person casual—a form famous for its lack of exclamation points. "She spoke of extraordinary things as if they were everyday," a former colleague of hers said last week; and I remembered that once, when she and I were talking idly in the hall, she murmured that she used to dream in Chinese.

What is disconcerting about her now that she has gone is how few of us, even among the old-timers, can claim a close friendship with her, much as we admired her. "She was a sweet-tempered feminist, who didn't dislike men," William Maxwell said. "She didn't see why she shouldn't do whatever they did, including sexually." Philip Hamburger recalls first meeting her in the Oak Room of the Plaza, where Harold Ross introduced them. "A beautiful woman," he said, "and smoking the biggest cigar you ever saw. I always liked her, but I can't say I really knew her."

Hahn had no end of friends, but she didn't hang out; she was always busy writing, or moving on—to Brasília or Nairobi or the British Museum, to a zoo conference somewhere, or perhaps back to her home at Little Gaddesden, in Hertfordshire, where she had a house, Ringshall End, and a happy long-term marriage to a University of London historian, Charles Boxer, whom she saw there for ninety days a year, thanks to the tax laws and to their shared preference for an intimacy built around absence. For years, she didn't have an office at the magazine, and we all counted ourselves lucky to catch a glimpse of such a staff celebrity, on the run between her books and her pieces, her departures and her children.

I was luckier than most, for I had first encountered Hahn under unforgettable circumstances. One day when I was twelve years old, she stepped out of a cab in front of our house on East Ninety-third Street, carrying a monkey in her arms—a monkey for me. Because my mother, Katharine White, was her editor, she had heard about my boy-naturalist inclinations and had determined, all on her own, to find me the most ravishing (and most inconvenient) pet imaginable. "Don't let her bite you," she said, handing over a small, solemn-faced, greenish-brown macaque, with a belt around its waist. "If she does, bite her right back—bite her on the ear—and she'll never do it again." She was right about that, it turned out, but by then I was convinced that she always knew exactly the right thing to do.

The Mickey Hahn story (her mother gave her the nickname) remains fresh and vivid, even in the broad scale. Born in St. Louis, she grew up in a powerful and iconoclastic family sisterhood, and took a degree in mining engineering at the University of Wisconsin—mostly, it seems now, because no one there expected a woman ever to do such a thing. She took a cross-country trip in a Model T (E. B. White had already made the same pre-writer hegira), and arrived at an early age in the pages of *The New Yorker*, thanks to her perfect pitch in the little arias of the casual. Her trip to the Congo lasted longer than she expected

What gives a woman style?

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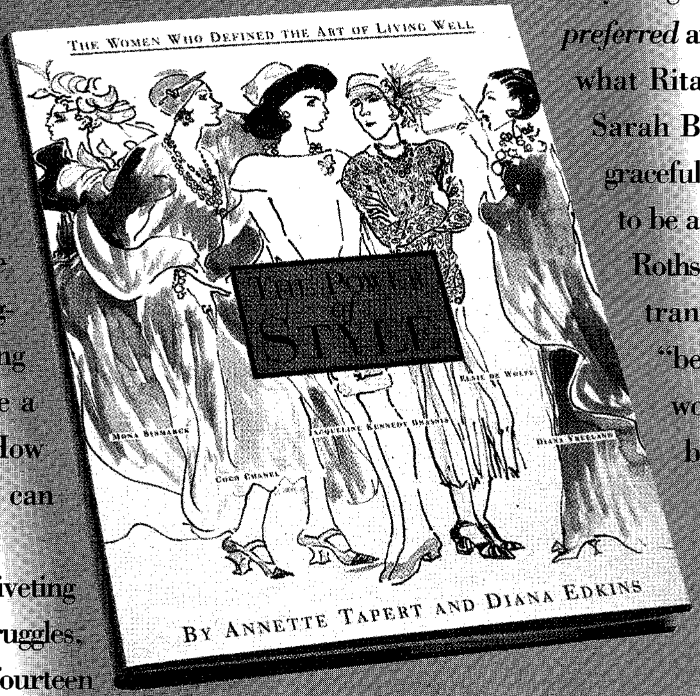
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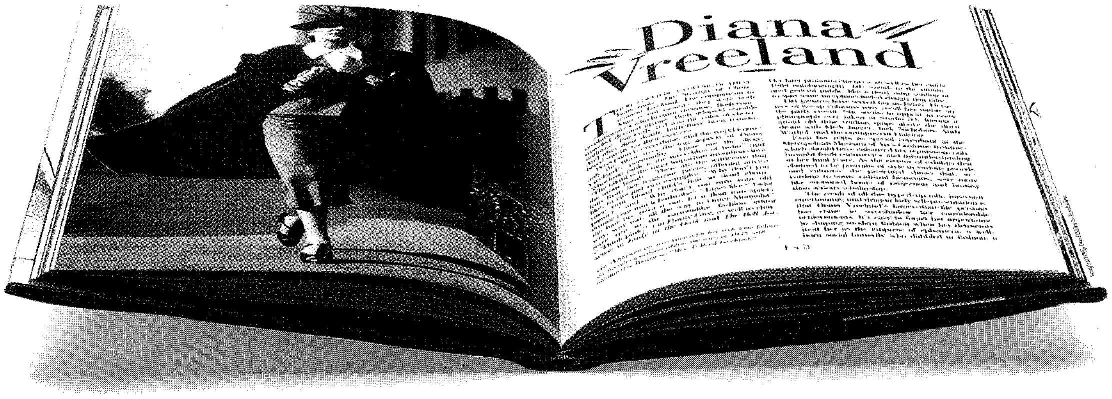
Diana Vreeland

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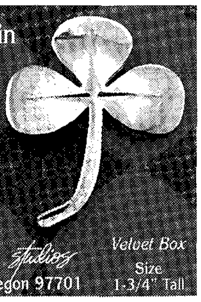

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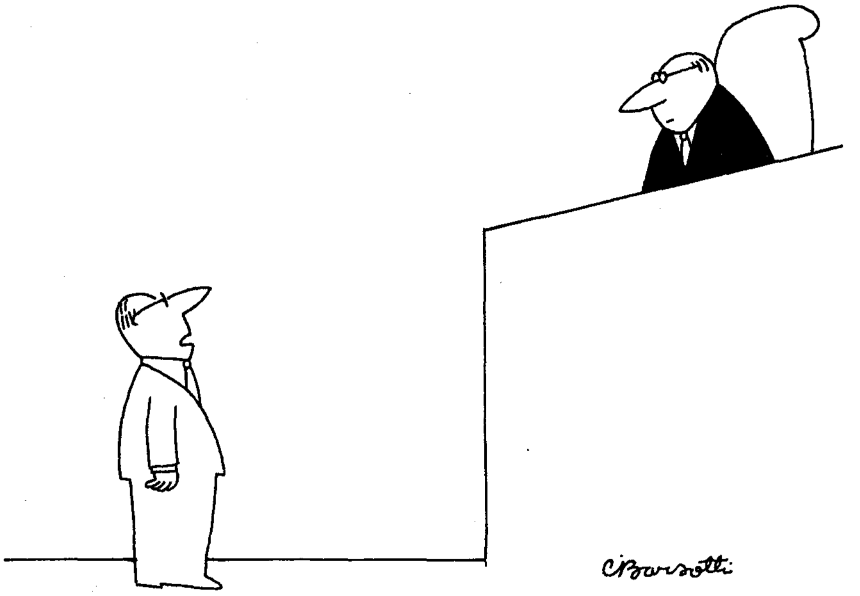
(she'd gone broke), but changes of scene and fortune came easily to her. In China next (where she became an official *New Yorker* correspondent), she had an extended affair with a married Chinese artist and poet, Zau Sinmay.

The main event of her life, one can say, began with a scandalous adventure: she fell in love with a British officer, Charles Boxer, and bore a daughter, Carola, out of wedlock. He was imprisoned by the Japanese after the fall of Hong Kong, and their reunion and marriage had to await the end of the war. She had remained free by claiming to be Eurasian, and contrived ways to visit him under the eyes of his captors. When it came time for her to accept repatriation, she broke the rules once again by bringing their child in a rickshaw, past the barbed wire, for a movielike farewell. Hahn writes about the moment with her usual economy: "Charles was waiting. He must have guessed I would take some such risk this last time. He turned and started walking step for step with the coolie, and I broke yet another rule and turned my head and looked straight at him. So did Carola."

Given such a flamboyant early résumé, and Hahn's ceaseless postwar journeys and writings (ultimately, there were fifty-two books), it should not come as a surprise if we sometimes overlooked both how lighthearted and how complicated she was, and what it was that she cared about in the end. What she tells about her two years in the Congo (in her published diary, "Congo Solo," and in a novel, "With Naked Foot") isn't just the romance of being a lone young American in such a place but the cruelties that white men inflict on African women. Hahn's move to China and her affair with Zau Sinmay placed her in a cosmopolitan and historically turbulent milieu, which she wrote about in her best-selling biography of the Soong sisters; but her long-running series of placid *New Yorker* casuals of that time, in which Zau becomes Pan Heh-ven, lingers on the ironies of colonial life, and of a traditional Chinese wife who is not permitted to cross the street alone. The best thing that Hahn wrote about her straitened years in Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation was a story, "The Baby-Amah," that centers on Carola's nurse, who had to be left behind in 1943, when her employer had a chance to go home. Similarly, a two-part Reporter at Large piece about that long trip home with her child, via India and Cape Town and Rio, with a shipload of missionaries and exchanged prisoners of war, barely touches on the risks and fears of an extraordinary wartime journey but turns instead to the alcoholic misdeeds of some returning merchant seamen, whom she liked better than anyone else aboard. A later report, "Pilgrim's Progress," describing her arrival at her sister's house, in Winnetka, is not about the comforts of America but about the nuisance of the returned adventurer to a family that has stayed at home. Penelope, she muses, couldn't have found it so easy when Ulysses turned up.

All her life, Hahn gravitated toward the unexpected and the informal. She was an even more spectacular reader than world traveller. Her two daughters remember mealtimes at home in Hertfordshire, with everyone at the table behind a book: their father invoked a rule of silence at meals,



"I plead guilty, Your Honor, but only in a nice, white-collar sort of way."

and their mother always broke it, with giggles and whispers. Hahn resolutely refused to learn the first thing about cooking, her younger daughter, Amanda, who was born in England after the war, cheerfully recalled the other day. "She kept offering to make us rice, but who wants rice?"

Hahn turned out major works of reporting—on diamonds and their history, for instance, and on the Philippines—and biographies of D. H. Lawrence and Aphra Behn and Raffles of Singapore, but an almost greater concurrent flow was made up of low-key memoirs and of books and novels for children. She knew the famous and the powerful but was more at home in the company of bartenders and cabdrivers, unpublished writers, widows, and nurses' aides, as well as her nieces and nephews, her daughters, and her four beloved sisters. In a multipart 1958 Reporter piece, "Last Days of the Maharajahs," she makes small talk with a maharajah's wife as they sip a Coca-Cola at Phoolsagar Palace, and then finds out that Her Highness of Bundi has never visited the nearby city of Agra. She has never been anywhere, in fact. "You see," the Maharanee says apologetically, "I'm in purdah."

The central preoccupation of Hahn's later writing years was zoos and monkeys and wildlife preservation, and particularly primate intelligence and animal communication. She became a distinguished scholar of the subject, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. "Either you have gibbons in your blood or you haven't," she once wrote disarmingly, but we may conclude now that it was the chance to dwell among the voiceless—how eagerly she seized it!—that drew her into the company of celebrated chimps and gorillas, like Washoe and Booee, Colo and Toto, and their painstaking keepers and researchers. It strikes me now that this was her most distant and adventurous journey, as well as her happiest. When I went into her empty office a couple of days after she died, I saw a bulletin board there that was overflowing with yellowing newspaper stories and photographs of gibbons and tamarins and chimpanzees and gorillas. "OPEN-HEART SURGERY PERFORMED ON ORANGUTAN," one headline read. The photographs made me smile, the way monkey pictures always do, and I thought of how Mickey Hahn had surely looked—that gleam of everyday transcendence—at the moment when she cut them out and pinned them up on her wall. ♦

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PROFILE

THE ACCIDENTAL ANARCHIST

His media empire is founded on lesbian Dial-a-Date, spankings, strippers, and outrageous insults. But Howard Stern just wants to be mainstream.

BY DAVID REMNICK

EVERY afternoon, in a splendid house on the North Shore of Long Island, a tall, middle-aged Jewish man named Howard Stern repairs to his basement office, a room filled with electronic equipment and an enormous aquarium. A small, vicious-looking shark wheels through the tank. Eels spool around the shark. The room is Stern’s office and refuge—the Batcave, he calls it. While his neighbors are still working away at the law firms and the brokerage houses of Manhattan, he settles into a high-backed leather chair, turns on his computer, and gets down to the serious business of, as he puts it, “writing a few more good penis-and-vagina jokes.”

The jokes are an essential component—the software—of Stern’s morning radio program and of a multimedia empire of books, television programs, audiotapes, videocassettes, compact disks, and now a movie. Even more essential to the empire is Stern’s creation of “Howard Stern” as an on-air persona: a sex-obsessed suburban nihilist, an arrested adolescent boiling with wit and arrogance and insecurity—Sophie Portnoy’s other son. “The premise of the show is to split open my head and let out the unadulterated id,” Stern said recently on the air. No one in the history of radio has gone farther by being in touch with his inner fifteen-year-old.

If Stern has a singular ambition, he told me, “it’s to be the most honest man in America.” In that spirit, he has felt compelled to inform his listeners that he is, regrettably, “hung like an acorn.” Stern’s gift for self-flagellating confession is so absolute and so expansive that he is perfectly capable of spending an hour of airtime dwelling on that shortcoming alone. In his next hour, of course, he is likely to dwell on the liabilities of everyone else: blacks, Jews, homosexuals, men, women, dwarfs, the nation of France. And Kathie Lee Gifford. *Especially* Kathie Lee Gifford.

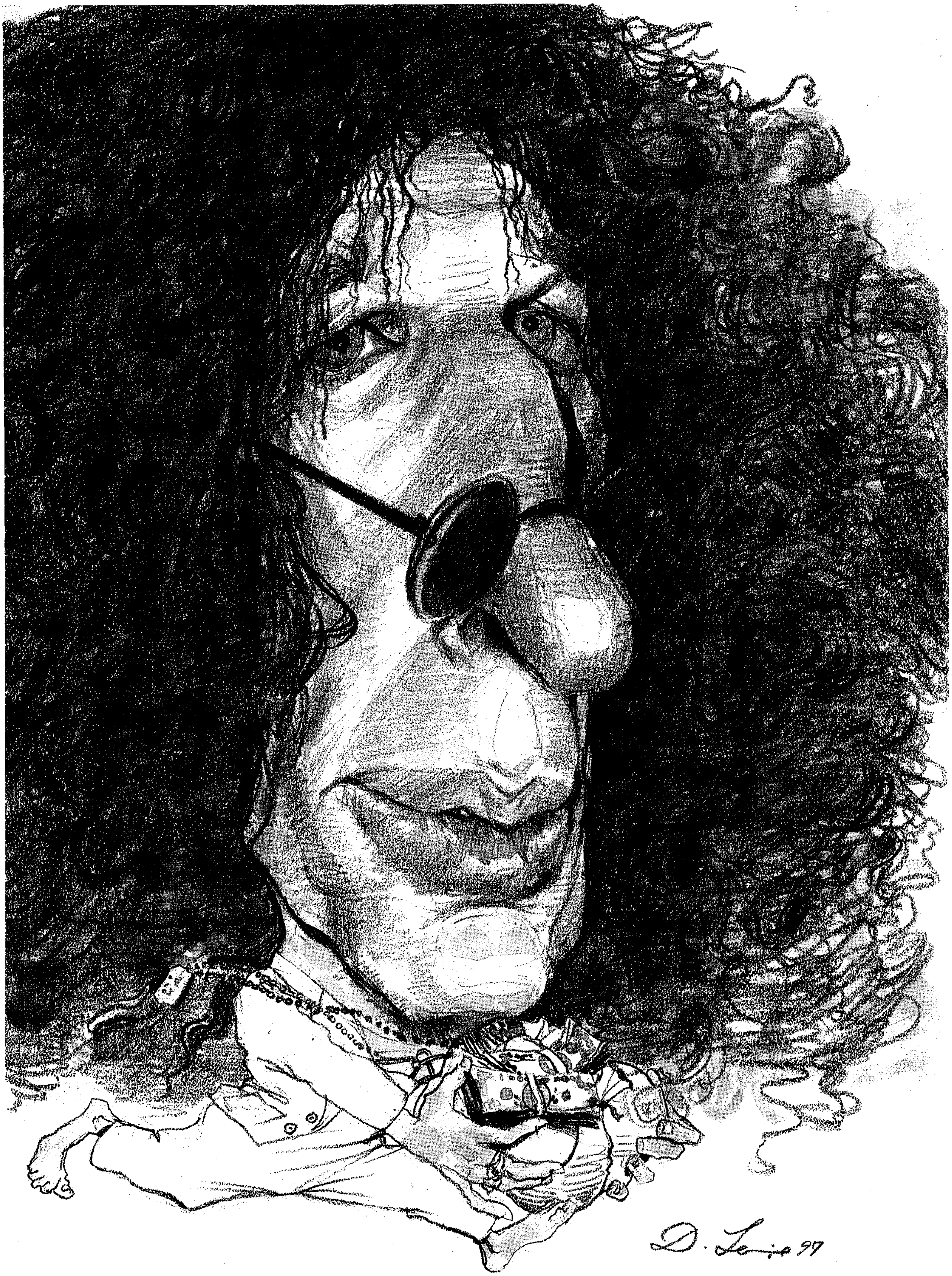
Every weekday morning, Stern puts on a show that is longer than “Gone with the Wind.” In the course of a morning commute, a listener might hear a brief speculation on the physical decline of Elizabeth Taylor (“I say we stuff her like Trigger and take her on tour!”); an interview with Fran (The Singing Psychic) Baskerville; a spanking session with a lesbian stripper; a comic rendition of the day’s news events, with his co-host, Robin Quivers, feeding him one straight line after another; and a long riff about his unsuccessful attempt to bind his wife, Alison, to the bed with neckties (“Stop it already! You’re cutting off my circulation!”). Finally, there might be a phone call from Alison.

Stern is forty-three, and, with his dark sunglasses and long tresses, looks rather like the lead guitarist in a heavy-metal band that has stayed on the road well past the age of plausibility. The look is a conceit, however—a professional necessity. By his own admission, Stern is a man who dresses like a Hell’s Angel but has “never been within fifteen feet of a scooter.” He is at least as industrious as any stockbroker in the other million-dollar houses in the neighborhood. (Stern’s crew asked me not to name the town where he lives. “We get death threats,” one staff member said. “Not all of Howard’s fans are completely stable.”)

After Stern has spun out a few more jokes in the basement, he may turn to another essential task: thinking up the sort of hand-grenade questions that his radio cohort John (Stuttering John) Melendez can lob at this or that celebrity in some crowded hotel lobby or press conference. Stern has become a gigantic American celebrity by assaulting the artificiality of American celebrity (is there anything more American than that?), and his foot soldier in the enterprise is Stuttering John. Once he has been armed by Stern, Melendez will approach an actress like Raquel Welch and ask if “they’re sagging yet”; he will haltingly inquire of Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell if they have ever passed gas on the runway. Not long ago, Melendez approached the bearded group ZZ Top and asked, “Since you look Jewish, why ddddd-don’t you call yourselves ZZ Dreidel?” The response to such a question—whether it’s verbal or a punch in Stuttering John’s mouth—is yet another feature of “The Howard Stern Show.”

Stern works endlessly at his act. He is a hermit, who shuttles between the dark basement on Long Island and a dark studio in the city. He has the complexion of a mushroom. He refuses to go out to dinner or to parties. He hates vacations. He avoids nearly all human contact except with his real family and his “radio family”: Quivers; Gary Dell’Abate, his producer; his writers, Jackie (The Jokeman) Martling and Fred Norris; and a gaggle of other producers, internes, and lackeys. Sometimes he and his pals from the show will go to Scores, a high-end strip joint on the East Side, but one suspects that this, too, is part of the arduous job of persona-maintenance. Far more often, Stern will stay in his basement, worrying about one project or another and flipping around through the channels of a hundred-inch television set. “I’m Chauncey Gardiner,” Stern told me. “Everything I learn is from TV.” Stern has written two books, but he doesn’t read books. “It bores me. It’s not fast enough. I’m not a bright guy. There’s no pictures.”

In the evenings, Stern spends at least some time with Alison and their children—three daughters. Alison started out as a psychiatric social worker but long ago dropped out of the profession in order to rear the children. She is an attractive (and, evidently, supremely patient) woman who lives the good life of the North Shore: various servants, tennis with her friends, a personal trainer, the occasional visit with a psychic. Stern is absolutely loyal to her, and announces that fact to the listening pub-



Howard Stern, the self-styled King of All Media: His radio persona, a heightened version of the real thing, is a raw parody of the modern id, male division, circa Long Island, 1972. Illustration by David Levine.

lic (sometimes ruefully). Although Stern's persona on the radio is based on his honesty, he is not quick to regale the family with accounts of what he did on the air that day. He does not describe, say, how he wished cancer on a particularly offensive celebrity or government official, or how he pondered aloud his sexual prospects ("after Alison is dead, of course") with various strippers, centerfolds, and politicians' wives. Stern does not allow his daughters, who are thirteen, ten, and four, to listen to the show. The winking understanding in the family is that "Daddy is a Harvard professor."

"My oldest daughter wants to read my books, and I'm sure she'll sneak off and read them at some point," Stern said. "But it would be embarrassing, because they're brutally honest. I'd prefer my daughters didn't know I masturbate every night."

Stern has been married to Alison for eighteen years, and they have been together for twenty-two. Their arguments are familiar ones, and yet they are not. For example, when Alison complains that her husband is not helping her enough with the children, Stern pleads fatigue. She is not entirely sympathetic. "You *must* be exhausted," she says. "Spanking lesbians all morning."

STERN has declared himself the King of All Media, and not without justification. His radio program is syndicated in thirty-five major markets and is ranked No. 1 in, among other cities, New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. Morning drive time is the key profit slot for radio stations, and Stern has made tens of millions of dollars for Infinity Broadcasting, which until recently owned WXRK, the station that broadcasts "The Howard Stern Show." In New York, his voice seems to emanate from half the cabs in midtown and the countless cars across the rivers nosing toward the tunnels and bridges. More than eighty per cent of Stern's listeners are in cars. In an increasingly atomized and suburban world, Stern and his cast members provide a social life.

"There's something traditional about it, too," the comedian and movie director Albert Brooks says. "You used to have 'The Breakfast Club' with Don McNeill, in the fifties, or the Arthur Godfrey show, where they had a cast and they did a real show. Howard does that, but what makes him really special is simple: he's funny. There are a lot of guys on the radio who just try to shock you. You've got a lot of guys on the radio saying 'penis.' Wow. 'Penis.' It's just dumb, and you turn it off. But Howard has wit, and wit stands out like crazy."

In Stern's media empire, radio is still his base, his capital. According to his biographer, Paul Colford, in 1995 Stern earned around eight million dollars from the radio show alone. But there is more. The E! Entertainment cable station films the radio show for broadcast at night, paying Stern a million and a half dollars a year. One of his cable extravaganzas, "The Miss Howard Stern New Year's Eve Pageant," grossed sixteen million dollars, making it the highest-earning pay-per-view program in the history of cable television aside from sports. Stern is also one of the best-selling authors in the country. A book signing for his first volume, "Private Parts," attracted a crowd of more than ten thousand people to a Barnes & Noble in Manhattan—enough to choke off Fifth Avenue temporarily. The scene was the same in Los Angeles and in San Francisco. No previous book in the history of Simon & Schuster had ever sold as fast—more than a million hardcover copies in just a few weeks. The sequel, "Miss America," was just as popular. One publishing source said that Stern the author has earned more than ten million dollars.

This month, Stern is expanding his empire, with the release of a motion-picture version of "Private Parts." The movie is surprisingly wholesome and conventional, a birth-humiliation-struggle-and-triumph biopic; this life of Stern is no more outrageous than "The Glenn Miller Story." Screenings have scored phenomenally well with test audiences, even in a city like Seattle, where Stern is not on the radio. Movie executives expect "Private Parts" to be "critic-proof" and to "open big" in its first weekend; Stern's ardent fans—and there are millions of them—will almost certainly rush out to see it, not least because Stern has been promoting the film ceaselessly on the radio.

"Private Parts" contains some sexual innuendo and strippers strutting their stuff in the studio, but in the end it is about the value of hard work, following your dream, and marital fidelity. It is a movie Bill Bennett will love—if he can only get past the scene with the lady who slides a gigantic kielbasa down her throat. Otherwise, there are shades of "Edison, the Man," a saga of innovation. It is about the way

A PERSISTENCE

On tour in Manchester, Franz Liszt "had to share the program with the Baby Harpist, the Infant Lyra 'not yet four years old'; as she was so tiny she had to climb onto a chair to play her miniature harp, still twice her size; she upstaged him." —*Paul Johnson.*

The gut-knots in the traffic-knots in the freeway-knots
of Chicago. Then the close gold nap of the Illinois fields
westers into the liverwurst-color clayey dirt of Kansas.
Oklahoma: roadkill sceptre-bones. Oklahoma: yucca, space and
more space, and that feedlot odor you smell direct with your blood.
Finally, the char-blue mountains and ghost-chants of New Mexico,
thunderbird, potteryware, kachina. Vacation vacation. The idea

is *away*, if not *escape* altogether: so that night
when we tangle up in love in our motel room we'll be
floating nonindigenously, like NASA travellers
broken free of the pull. Not *nowhere*. New-where. But
reality is: I wonder is the mail being held; already
you miss the paths the years wear through a room.
Whatever limits us defines us and the definition lasts

beyond the limits. Even poling a gondola up
the Venice mazes, that would be true. Amid the painful
beauty gleaming off the ice scarps, that would be true.

It's certainly true here. This acetylene sunrise
burns the desert clean of every detail every morning,
except for our memories; their gluey feathers, their
guilts and grandeurs, tug us with a gravity

the greater for its source's growing small, the way
a black hole works. That first afternoon, half-willfully
lost in leaving the sanitized Plaza section,
we pass a woman leaning from a cracked adobe window
with such wistfulness across her own cracked face . . .
I imagine . . . she's forty-five or six. It's starting to rain
again, and ruins her drying laundry. I imagine . . .

it's raining, the goat tied in the broken courtyard dances
its dislike of the weather, she turns back to the room and sees
the eel in the pan—between immense pig-knuckle mounds—
is like a river in the hill land that she came from . . .
now the eel calls . . . the wash blown from the rope calls . . .
So much drabness. Wasn't there something else? . . .
She leans an ear against one unbroken string

of her long-gone music.

—ALBERT GOLDBARTH

Stern ripped off the shackles of radio convention in Detroit seventeen years ago and made the historic decision to get rid of his phony FM-d.j. voice and "go completely honest," to use Irene, the Leather Weatherlady ("Bitch, this is the weather, and if you don't like it I'm going to come over and beat the crap out of you!"). It is the story of the man who counts as his greatest achievement hosting "the first naked lady in the history of radio."

"Private Parts" is meant to be a moralist's tract. As a nascent celebrity, Stern (who plays himself) is tempted by other women, and yet he remains true, always, to Alison. There is a scene in which he endures the sort of trial-by-erection that Mahatma Gandhi inflicted on himself when he slept with young girls to test his sexual discipline. A voluptuous actress invites Stern up to her hotel room and into the bathtub with her. Wary, but tempted, Stern climbs in—with his underwear still on. The actress makes every effort to clinch the deal, but Stern's resolve prevails. Conscience defeats libido, and Stern goes running out of the room, faithful to the end.

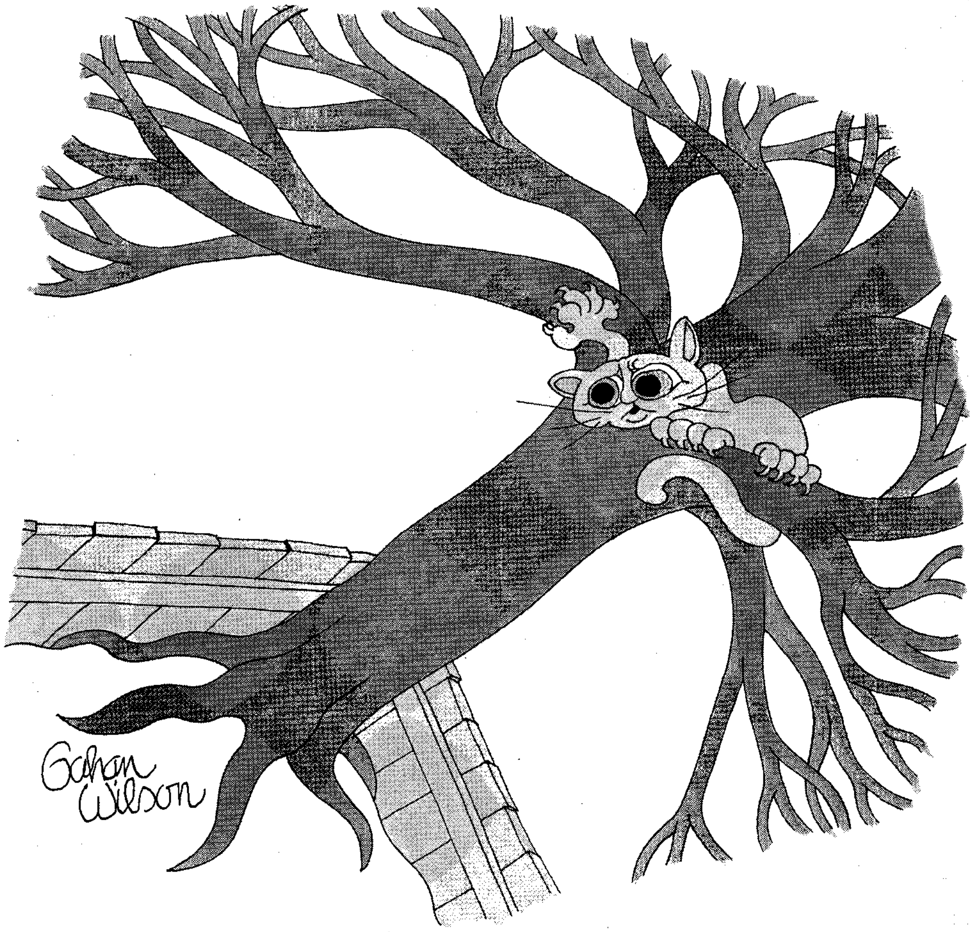
In the movie's last scene, Stern stands before an adoring crowd in Bryant Park, having finally achieved stardom. He has overcome the mores of a homogeneous medium, the strictures of moronic station managers, and the fines of the Federal Communications Commission. In the traditional cri de cœur of the triumphant comic, he grabs the microphone and, over the roar of a standing ovation, shouts, "We are gathered here today in praise of me!" At the height of the love-in, as the heavy-metal band AC/DC kicks off a soundtrack hit, Alison's water breaks. The Sterns rush to the hospital. A wholesome simultaneous ecstasy occurs. A star is born, and so is his daughter.

Stern has himself right. His persona is a raw parody of the modern id—particularly the modern id, male division, circa Long Island, 1972. His radio character, which is a heightened version of the real thing, is a man whose rage and injuries show themselves in adolescent jokes about farting and sex and race; he is the kid in the college lounge talking back to the TV; he is the funniest guy at the bar, who never moves on, never grows up, never knows when he has gone too far or said too much. And yet, both on the radio and in reality, Stern is no radical. His barbs are intended not to assault tradition but to preserve it. The language is ribald, but at heart Stern is an earnest scold, a poster boy not only for the honest expression of the id but for the triumph of the superego, arguing restraint and loyalty. He writes in "Private Parts":

> You want the secret of life? Here it is: You wake up in the morning. You eat a little breakfast, maybe read the newspaper. You attempt to go to school if you're that age. If your teacher tells you to sit in the chair, you sit in the chair. If you don't feel like it, you force yourself, anyway. You get older, the routine doesn't change. You eat breakfast, you go to work, you come home. If you're lucky enough, you're married. If you're not, then maybe you have a boyfriend or girlfriend. You yell at your wife, you make up with your wife. If your testicles feel all right, you bang your wife. You watch a video you rented or maybe you go out to the movies. Then you go home to your bedroom, you mellow out a little bit. If you're the late Sam Kinison you take a schnapps. Then maybe you get a snack, have some strawberries and cream, and wash it down with a Snapple. Then you snore away for eight hours, you wake up, and you do it all over again.

THE instinct of satire is conservative. There are exceptions, but the tendency of satirists has always been to lash out at intellectualism, at utopian dreaming, at immigrants and fads, at all that seems new and threatening to the existing order of things. Aristophanes in his plays attacked Socrates and the Sophists, the liberal party of his day. His greatest joke was obscene: a sexual strike by the women in "Lysistrata," leaving all the men with lonely hard-ons. In Rome, Juvenal upbraided the corruption of the empire and the nouveaux riches. "Gulliver's Travels" explores the folly of modernity and optimism and ends in a revelation of human limitations. Nathanael West's "Day of the Locust" so thoroughly mocked the pleasure-seeking, bliss-chasing souls of California (the story ends in an apocalyptic stampede) that he found himself branded a Fascist.

Even Lenny Bruce, who became a living cause of First Amendment activists after he was arrested for obscenity and prevented from performing, was not an exception to the idea of satirists as conservatives. According to Bruce's biographer, Albert Goldman, he was just as moralistic and conservative as the judges and district attorneys who went after him. "Lenny Bruce was a man with an almost infantile attachment to everything that was sacred to the American lower-middle class. He believed in romantic love and marriage and fidelity and absolute honesty and incorruptibility—all the preposterous absolutes of the unqualified conscience," Goldman wrote. "The attempt



"I can remember when there would have been a fire truck here in ten minutes, tops!"

to make Lenny superior to morality, to make him a hippie saint or a morally transcendental *artiste*, was tantamount to missing the whole point of his sermons, which were ferociously ethical in their thrust and firmly in touch with all the conventional values."

Stern is a low-end version of these satirists; no one would suggest that his dirty jokes are up to the dirty jokes of Rabelais, or even of Moms Mabley. But there is a similarity in his intention. His jokes, bad or funny, gross or sharp, are a cumulative blast at the contemporary rhetoric of piety and identity politics. In part, at least, his appeal is to an audience that feels put upon by a new set of rules—sexual-harassment guidelines, the taboo against certain kinds of speech—and wants release, if only in the privacy of the drive to work. Stern's allegiance to conventional values is the foundation of his comedy, even at its base worst. He can make jokes about all the other women he wants to have sex with because the audience understands (having heard it so often) that he has been faithful to his wife and intends to stay that way—"even though I get propositioned now two, three times a day."

"Howard's conception of the world is that he really believes that if he hurts Alison or cheats on her or leaves her his life will be over," Judith Regan, Stern's friend and book editor, says. "He told me once that if he ever left Alison his mother would take Alison's side. He'd also lose his entire persona. He'd no longer be one of us. He'd become one of them. He'd be every other celebrity who says sanctimonious things and acts like a jerk."

"Howard has built himself a uniquely conservative world to blast out of," Albert Brooks says. "If he were screwing sixteen girls a day, he couldn't do it. For one thing, people would hate him. They'd be too jealous."

Similarly, Stern is able to make jokes about racial and sexual stereotypes: he can use the crudest stereotypes for humor because his listeners understand, for one thing, that he is an "equal opportunity" comedian—that no one is safe. It is also helpful (even shrewd) that his co-host, Robin Quivers, is black and is genuinely his closest friend. Quivers is a former nurse and Air Force officer, and with barely a phrase ("Oh, c'mon, Howard") she can often steer her partner out of a bad or hurtful joke. The audience also knows that Stern is not some white guy who has never known any African-Americans: he spent the better part of his youth in Roosevelt, Long Island, in schools where he was one of just a handful of whites, and saw at first hand the failure of integration.

Stern is not as overtly political as, say, Rush Limbaugh. Instead, he is a raw and sometimes funny representation of the new majority party in the country: suburban, somewhat libertarian, somewhat illiberal. That is, pro-choice, anti-tax, resentful of affirmative action. "The silent goofy majority," Stern has called it. He is perfectly capable of supporting Clinton and Gingrich, Al D'Amato and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and, at the same time, disdaining all politicians. When he threatened (in the comic tradition of Dick Gregory, Pat Paulsen, and Norman Mailer) to run for governor of New York in 1994, he announced that he had a three-point platform: (1) fix the roads at night; (2) kill the criminals ("A volt for every vote!"); and (3) resign after accomplishing Points 1 and 2. It was an amusing cartoon to everyone except his potential rivals. Stern's eventual withdrawal from the race (mainly because he refused to complete financial-disclosure documents) helped George Pataki, who had been afraid that Stern would drain off Republican votes. At Pataki's swearing-in, one of the seats closest to the Governor was occupied by Howard Stern.

In the 1994 New Jersey gubernatorial race, Stern decided he would endorse the first candidate to call in to his program. The first to call was Christine Todd Whitman, the Republican.

"By the way," Stern told her, "may I say that I find you somewhat attractive? Seriously, you keep yourself in good shape. You're good-looking. You've got our endorsement."

"I'll take it any way I can get it," Whitman replied.

"And at your inauguration," Stern said, "may I recommend wearing a thong?"

Later, Whitman expressed her gratitude

by suggesting that a toll booth be named for Howard Stern. Stern held out for a rest stop: "A toll booth is a negative—you got to pay to go through it. But to have a place where people go to the bathroom and feel relieved—that would be the ultimate." After her victory, Whitman made good on the promise, with a rest stop named for Stern on Interstate 295. Now, Stern points out, he has taken his place with Walt Whitman, Vince Lombardi, James Fenimore Cooper, Thomas Edison, and Woodrow Wilson—"all great Americans who also had crappers named after them in New Jersey."

STERN wakes at 4 A.M. A car and chauffeur wait outside in the suburban dark. On the ride into Manhattan (and on the ride back to Long Island), he sits in the back seat and meditates. Stern has been practicing transcendental meditation for twenty years. In the rare moments when he thinks about retiring from celebrity, he will talk about moving to Iowa, "where they have a really big TM center." He doesn't talk about this very often.

The studios of WXRK—better known as K-ROCK—are on West Fifty-seventh Street, and when Stern arrives at his office, on the fourteenth floor, he looks through the morning papers and mulls over the day's show.

Just before six, Stern takes his place behind a console that appears to have enough computer and sound equipment to launch a space shuttle. To his left sit the male members of his team, Norris and Martling, who periodically slip him jokes and ideas or trigger tape loops of cackling, applause, gunfire, a toilet flushing, or whatever else might heighten Stern's effects. Robin Quivers sits in a glass broadcast booth of her own. "There is this sort of voyeur quality to the booth," she said. "Like I'm looking at the boys when they're not with women and seeing what it's like." As a sidekick, Quivers is far more important to Stern than Ed McMahon ever was to Johnny Carson. Her job is to interject, to prod, to ask the leading question, and, not least, to laugh. She has a shimmering laugh. All the while, she is leafing through the morning's wire copy and a stack of newspapers. From these sources—in particular, Page Six, of the *Post*—she assembles the day's news, a long centerpiece of the show.

On the morning when I was supposed to visit the show for the first time, my wife looked up from her pillow and asked, "So what are you wearing to go see Howard Stern? Crotchless jeans?"

I caught a cab on the corner. The driver was listening to Howard Stern.

"Are you shaved for action?" Stern was asking a caller. And then I heard, "Butt sex?"

It was awfully early.

Eventually, Stern launched into a long riff about how, although he is usually a sexual performer who can be counted on for a solid twenty seconds of action ("and then . . . *boom!*"), he had found himself the night before to be in record-setting form with his wife. Alas, Stern announced, one of his children had bronchitis, and during the act of love the little dear could be heard in the next room coughing and wheezing. This caused Alison Stern to interrupt her husband's winning streak and look in on her daughter. Alison does not always mind when her husband is describing for millions what in most families are secrets. All America knows, for instance, that she is not "a three-input woman."

"My wife doesn't like it when I talk about it on the air—about how we use a vibrator, and things like that," Stern told me later, after the show, in his office. "She hates it. She says, 'Isn't anything private?' Sometimes we'll be arguing and she'll go, 'I know you're going to use this on the air.' And I wasn't even *thinking* of using it on the air, and I go, 'Ooh, yeah.' " When Stern was broadcasting in Washington, in the early eighties, he not only informed his audience that his wife had suffered a miscarriage but made jokes about it. Alison felt betrayed by that, but this morning it seemed that her husband had not gone too far at all. Alison called the studio (something she does fairly often) and went on the air with Stern to tell her side of the previous evening's sex-and-bronchitis epic.

"I felt really torn," she said. "This was an extenuating circumstance."

"Daddy was skewering Mommy," Stern said. Then he asked his wife, "Didn't I hold out for twenty minutes?"

"I think so," came the uncertain reply.

"I was going like a *piston*," Stern said, "And then you asked, 'Are you almost finished?' "

"What's wrong with that?"

On other shows, I've heard Stern be just as raw with his parents, Ray and Ben Stern. His mother, Ray, he claims, "raised me like a veal." He was almost never let out of the house. "To this day," Stern writes in "Private Parts," "I can't go out of

"Which one do you suppose is the alpha?"

the house for more than five minutes without worrying that something bad is going to happen to me. I live in fear of everything. I can't enjoy life, so I sit in my house and vegetate. Under dim lights, of course. I confess. I'm an obsessive-compulsive, anal-retentive, miserable neurotic because I was raised by a woman who ran her household with the intensity of Hitler."

Stern occasionally calls his mother, puts her on the air, and tortures her with his version of his childhood and adolescence. One morning, he tried to get her to admit that he spent hours in his room smoking dope. "Didn't you smell the smoke, Mom? I was upstairs smoking a doobie by the window!"

"You just like to wear these things as a badge of honor," Mrs. Stern said.

Stern told his mother that, despite it all, he loved her.

"You love me?" she replied. "This is the way you show your love?"

Ben Stern was a radio engineer. He and several partners bought a small recording studio in Manhattan, and worked there with disk jockeys like Symphony Sid and actors who had jobs in cartoons—like Don Adams, the voice of Tennessee Tuxedo. Evidently, Ben Stern was not a placid man. "My father's favorite sport was yelling," his son reports.

"Hey, Dad, how was your day?" little Howard would ask.

"Are you putting me on? *Shut up!*" came the answer.

"Dad, I'm just asking . . ."

"You don't care about my day! *Shut up, you moron!*"

Stern once dug up an old tape of his father quizzing him, when he was a schoolkid, on current events. Not infrequently, Ben Stern loses his temper on the tape and shouts things like "Shut up, sit down!" or "I told you not to be stupid, you moron!" Stern spliced the tape up and used it as part of an extended fake advertisement for the Ben Stern Day-Care Center.

"Any spark of vitality will be eradicated by our professionals!"

"*Shut up, sit down!*"

"If you want a doctor or a lawyer, look elsewhere! But if you want a snivelling mess, then the Ben Stern Day-Care Center is the place for you!"

"*Shut up, sit down!*"

Stern is always quick to mention that he never doubted that he grew up in a loving household, but he has also remarked, "It's amazing I didn't become a mass murderer like John Wayne Gacy."

Stern is not the first comedian to make material out of his childhood and inject it with an element of revenge. Nothing seems to delight him more than indulging his sense of vengeance. He mocks rival hosts, calls up old girlfriends "who had their chance."

"Revenge is not sweet enough, though," Robin Quivers told me after the show one morning. "Howard is constantly revisiting the past, and somehow it isn't enough to have the entire world be in love with you. He still wants the people who didn't love him before to love him now. A couple of weeks ago, we were on the phone with some girl he had wanted but she'd dated a friend of his instead. Howard called her up and he said, 'Why wouldn't you? Why didn't you? Didn't you know? See who I am now? Look at what a great life you would have had. I would have married you.' He really wants them to feel how wrong they were. And it has to be a personal thing. It has to be somebody 'who knew me then, didn't love me then.' I want to hear them love me now. And he's never going to get that. Because they don't love him. They didn't love him then and they don't love him now."

"Maybe it was the way I was raised, or something, but I always feel like I'm garbage," Stern told me. "I think what it comes down to, and maybe this is a personality flaw again, a character flaw, but I could go to a book signing and see twenty thousand people out there and I don't feel great from that. Which is a shame. You'd think that that kind of adulation would make you feel on top of the world. And yet I don't. I don't know why."

It is an odd experience to interview Stern. He is a calmer, less edgy version of "Howard Stern." "You have to remember that Howard is his own invention," Dick Cavett, an occasional guest, told me. "In the greenroom, he talks about 'going into my character.' " It's impossible to tease a revelation from a man who on the air readily admits that as he was growing more and more successful he was also suffering from terrible back pain and from obsessive-compulsive disorder. He went through incredible counting rituals, tapping the wall, counting in his head. A back specialist named John Sarno led Stern to realize that the pain and the behavior were related, and he helped cure him of both. At the end

SHOWCASE BY ARTHUR ELGORT

DULCINEA

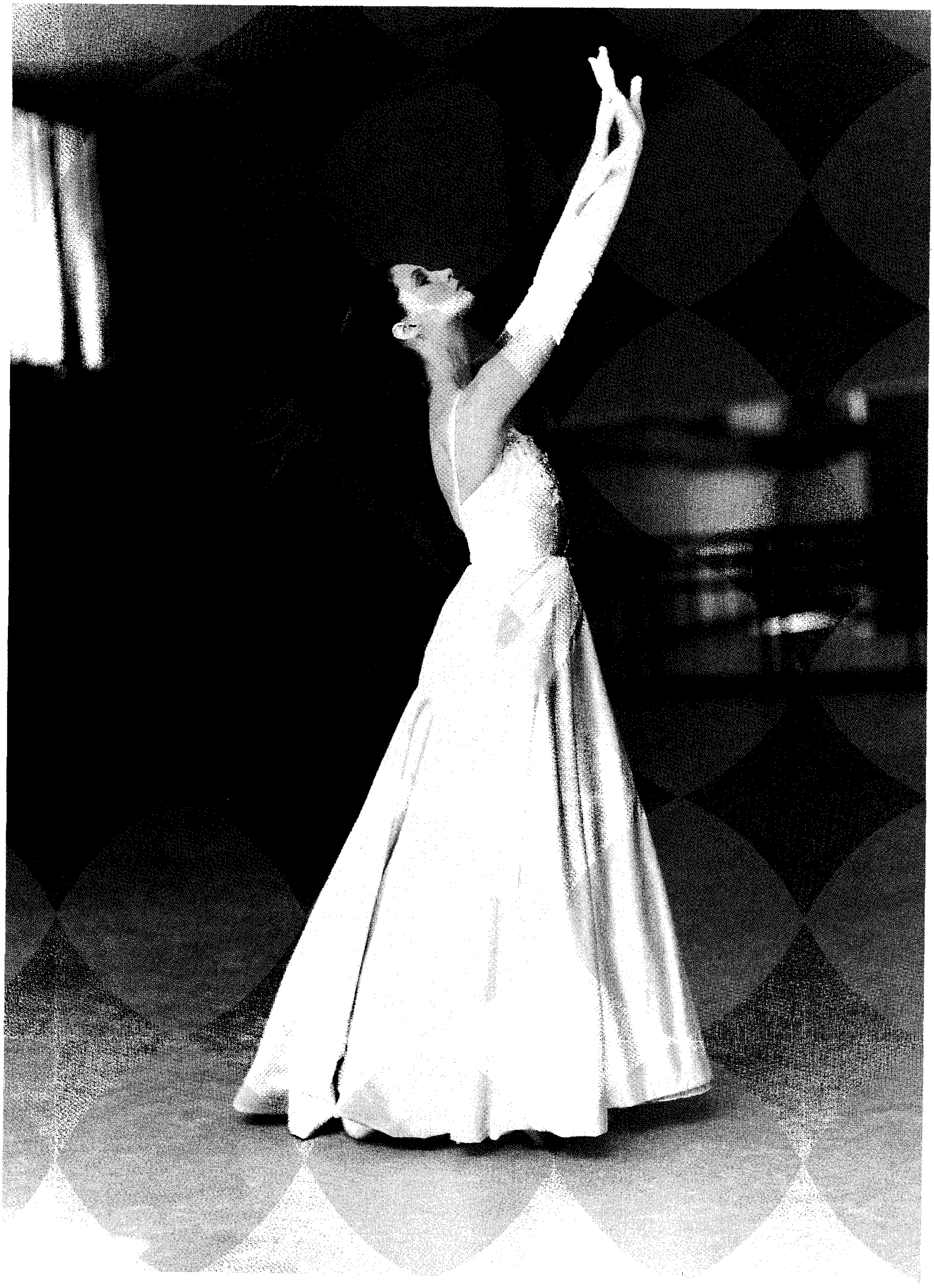
"SUZANNE FARRELL: ELUSIVE MUSE" is essential viewing for the archival footage alone, some of it never before seen outside hush-hush get-togethers over pirated tapes. Anne Belle and Deborah Dickson's movie, to be shown at the Walter Reade Theatre from March 28th through April 3rd, is up for an Oscar as best documentary, and it includes the most astonishing piece of dance footage I have ever encountered: Farrell's solo from Act III of Balanchine's "Don Quixote." Her technique is heart-stopping. Within a single pirouette, she can do five other things (leg up, leg down, leg doing some undreamed-of business) before the turn is completed. But the technique is just the bones; over it lies the flesh—her avidity, her wild joy. You feel as if you were seeing something private, something from your own life.

The movie is more than the clips, though. Imagine the situation. In 1961, Farrell, age sixteen, joins New York City Ballet. Balanchine, forty-two years older, falls in love and announces his passion in the ballets he makes for her, notably the 1965 "Don Quixote." Everything is wonderful—but soon it isn't. The great choreographer, it turns out, actually wants to marry her. Farrell, hemmed in, marries a fellow-dancer and leaves the company. But eventually there is a third act: the ballerina returns, and Balanchine now makes for her works not of longing but simply of love.

The film occasionally goes misty. Farrell reads to us from her teenage diaries—a bad idea. But her summation is dry-eyed: "He said, 'You know, Suzanne, if I weren't a choreographer you wouldn't look at me twice.' And I . . . said, 'You know, George, if I weren't a ballerina, you wouldn't look at me twice.' I think how you dance is who you are, and that's what he fell in love with." In other words, the experience was transformed—life made dance—from the very start.

—JOAN ACOCELLA

Farrell in costume for Balanchine's "Vienna Waltzes," 1979.

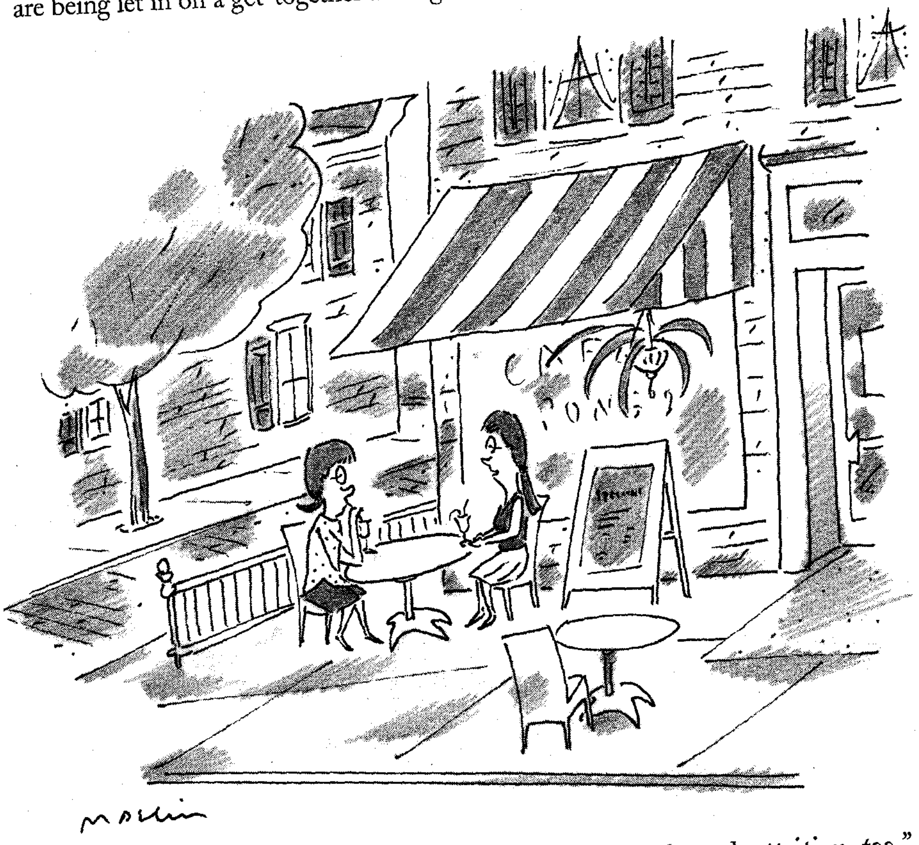


of their time together, Sarno gave Stern the name of a psychotherapist: "He said I should go a couple of times a week. But I don't go. I should. I need it."

STERN'S show is of the same generation and genus as *The National Lampoon* and Richard Pryor, Sam Kinison and David Letterman, but its roots are in the history of American radio—specifically, the radio on New York stations that people of my, and Stern's, generation grew up on. The long monologues he spins out about his childhood can sometimes feel like antic cousins to Jean Shepherd's growing-up tales, set in Middle America. The ability to turn ridiculously banal ad copy into comedy or monologue comes from Long John Nebel, who used to riff for ten minutes on "the wonders of sand-dollar jewelry." The abusive side comes from Bob Grant and Joe Pyne (on the right) and Larry Josephson (on the left), though Stern's abuse is relatively mild and more obviously ironic. (It requires the most generous of spirits to believe that Bob Grant's full-throated race-baiting is not heartfelt.)

Perhaps the most distinctive quality of Stern's show is the feeling it conveys of being overheard, the illusion that you are being let in on a get-together among friends that would be going on whether you were listening or not. In a medium ordinarily ruled by the clock—by traffic and weather reports, by news and station identifications—Stern ignores the clock. He ends the show at ten-thirty or later, "or whenever I feel it's done." In that way, he derives from performers as diverse as Bob Fass, who invented the term "free-form radio," at WBAI, and Ed and Pegeen Fitzgerald, whose morning program on WOR made you feel you were listening in on an ideal set of grandparents as they chatted amiably with the house guests over their coffee and morning toast. Stern's program is like that, except that the house guests are Laura (The Foot Massage Woman) Norman, the Jesus Twins, and the Woman with Three Breasts.

In a way, Stern began conceiving and rehearsing his show the day he was seven years old and his father gave him a Wollensack tape recorder. He immediately began making up radio shows. He experimented with his voice. He told long, absurd stories. As he got older and more antic, he perfected the high suburban art of the phony phone call, ringing up Chinese restaurants to order a quart of Itchy Balls and the local druggist for some LSD. (In later years, Stern unleashed a platoon of phony phone callers. One treasures the memory from the 1992 campaign of Ross Perot's scarlet ears when a caller to the "Today" show asked him, "Mr. Perot, have you ever had the desire to mind-meld with Howard Stern's penis?")



"What a coincidence! I lost my *first two husbands through attrition, too."*

"Private Parts"—both the book and the movie—describes an adolescence of quiet desperation, of self-abuse and Huckapoo shirts, of being called Howard Sperm by other kids, of getting dumped by a girl because she has found a boy "with a really big penis." And, like so many suburban kids, Stern spent a lot of time "self-medicated." He once told an interviewer from *Playboy*, "The one drug that I really loved was Quaaludes, or any kind of down that sedated me and made me forget who the fuck I was and how disgusting and ugly I was. I loved that sensation."

His sense of identity and injury derived from where he lived—in the mile-square town of Roosevelt, Long Island. In the sixties, Roosevelt became an experiment in integration, and, as in many other such towns, the whites could not move out fast enough. Ray and Ben Stern, however, were determined liberals. They stayed on. Soon white kids accounted for fewer than a third of the high-school students. Roosevelt was also home to the basketball star Julius Erving, the comedian Eddie Murphy, and the rap group Public Enemy. It might be wise to allow for what Ben Stern calls "Howard's exaggerations," but Stern says that he really was beaten up in school: "I felt like Piggy in 'Lord of the Flies.' " His lunch money was stolen "on a daily basis." Once, somebody even stole his pants.

"If there's any reason I have sort of a skeptical view of the world, it's Roosevelt," Stern told me when we talked in his office one day after the show. "The hypocrisy was that you had this white community with a lot of liberal Jews and Christians living there who preached brotherhood, and overnight there was an exodus, as soon as there was black skin in the community. That community didn't have to become all black at once. It could have become a fully integrated community. But people were phonies and they left. I felt my parents were very brave in that they stayed there.

"Later, we moved to Rockville Centre, which was an all-white community, and I freaked out, because a lot of the discussion in the classrooms was about how we have to learn to live with our brothers. And I would sit there and go, ‘You fucking assholes, no way you’re going to live with your brothers. You’re going to head for the hills.’ In Roosevelt, I experienced *being white*, you know what I mean? Being white as a negative thing. And I never fully understood it. How did it leave me? I was traumatized.

“I never understood it, because I said, ‘Jesus, I’m the one white guy trying to live in this community. There’s a lily-white community the next town over, Merrick, Long Island. Go beat the shit out of the people who don’t want to live with you. Why are you beating the shit out of the one guy who *wants* to live with you?’ I thought it was great that I was there, and there was also a very beautiful thing about the culture there. I learned that, number one, black people were no different from white people; that, given a situation of power, people were all the same; and that black people given a situation of power were no better or no worse than white people. They were just as racist, they were just as mean-spirited. It didn’t make a difference. And I guess that left me a little demoralized and down on humanity.”

“He was someone you had to light a fire under in order to get anything done.”

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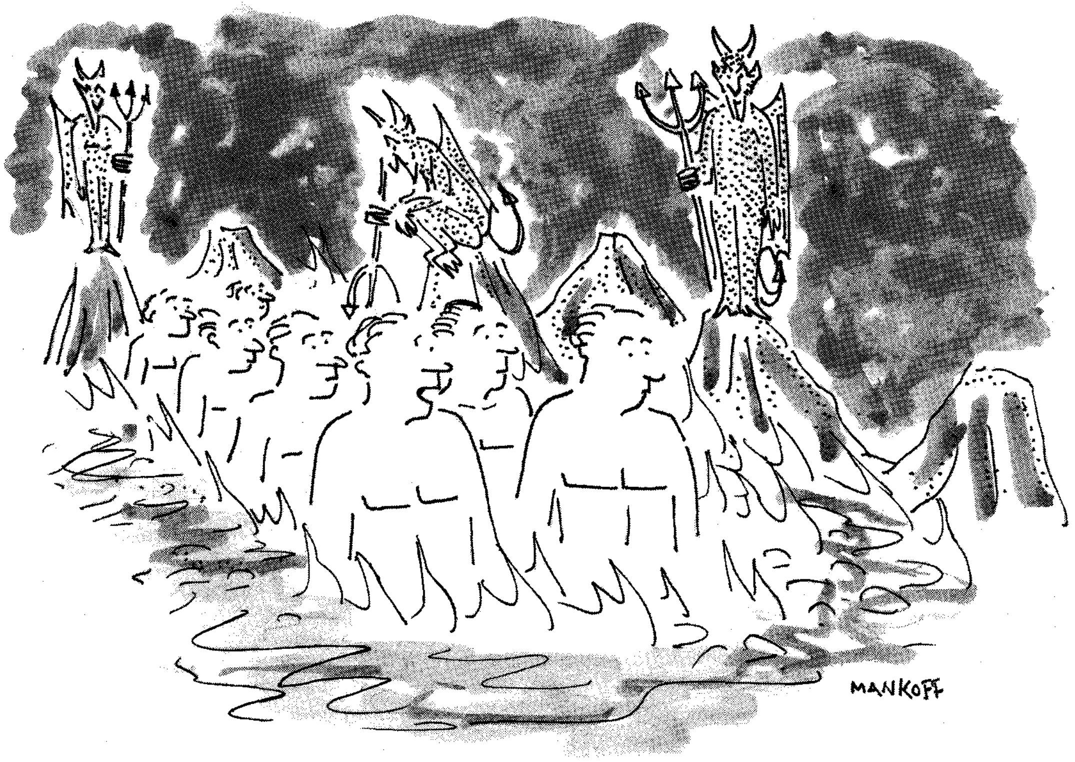
WITH the help of a diet and a good makeup artist, Stern plays himself at twenty in “Private Parts.” He is six feet five and skinny, with a huge nose and the sort of nimbus haircut that is the staple of all Long Island high-school yearbooks. When he got to Boston University, in 1972, he worked his way into getting himself a show on the college radio station. He was the host of “The King Schmaltz Bagel Hour” and got in trouble with an episode called “Godzilla Goes to Harlem.”

The happiest event for Stern in college was meeting Alison, a young woman who struck him as too good to be true. (“My sexual history was a nightmare. When a woman dug me, she was either a psychopath or a misfit or her back moved by itself.”) He cast her in a student film on transcendental meditation. On their first date, they drank a bottle of Blue Nun and saw a movie—Dustin Hoffman in “Lenny.”

“The movie had a profound effect on me,” Stern told me. “I wasn’t familiar with Lenny Bruce until then. Didn’t know much about him. The movie inspired me to read that Lenny Bruce book.” Stern does not exaggerate the connection with Bruce, but in the book “Private Parts” he includes a “special message,” which goes, “What we try to do with humor is show the absurdity of the differences between people, as Lenny Bruce did when he used words like *nigger* and *kike* and *wop* in an attempt to demystify them and rob them of any power they may have. Underneath all the differences, we’re all in this together.” Whereas a rebel like Bruce may have been content with a jazz audience—passionate, knowing, and small—Stern wants to be loved by millions, and to do that he is willing to break character and justify his ethnic and sexual material. He may disdain the politically correct, but he wants their laughs, and their money, too, if he can get it.

After college, Stern worked at stations in Westchester County, Hartford, and Detroit, and slowly transformed himself from a second-rate FM-music joke (“And now a little tune from the dark side of the moon”) to the character he is now. When I moved to Washington, in the early eighties, everyone was talking about this new local d.j., Howard Stern, who was doing “Gay Dial-a-Date,” “Hill Street Jews,” “Beaver Breaks,” and a dozen other set pieces. In January, 1982, after an Air Florida flight crashed into the Fourteenth Street Bridge, Stern pretended to call Air Florida and ask, “What’s the price of a one-way ticket from National to the Fourteenth Street Bridge?” Washington is a small city but a major media center, and so there were suddenly stories in the press about Howard Stern, the outrageous “shock jock.”

Later that year, Stern accepted an offer to go to WNBC, in New York, but



"Look, it could be worse—at least we're dead."

• •

just before he started the new job Douglas Kiker, of NBC News, did a piece for "NBC Magazine" called "X-Rated Radio."

"What you're about to hear is going to shock you because it's vulgar, even obscene," Kiker began. "A warning: If there are any children in the room you might not want them to watch this report. It's X-rated radio, barnyard radio, and there's more and more of it on the air because kids love it."

The scene cut from Kiker to a radio with Stern's voice saying, "I hear your pappy is so disgusting that he takes a bubble bath by farting in a mud puddle!"

Then the scene cut to Kiker turning off the radio with his baby in his lap. "This is my home in Washington," Kiker intoned. "It's secure enough. I've got locks on the windows, locks on the doors, even an alarm system. What I cannot prevent entering my home are the sounds that come over this radio. The idea for this story originated a few weeks ago when I heard my seven-year-old son, this one's older brother, coming down for breakfast saying the same things you just heard this d.j. say." Then Kiker interviewed a panel of "concerned parents." One of them said, "Vietnam at dinnertime was bad enough, but this stuff over my Cocoa Puffs is driving me crazy! It just doesn't need to be there."

At WNBC, Stern was handed a list of commandments: he was not to do any "jokes or sketches relating to personal tragedies"; there could be no "slander, defamation, or personal attacks on private individuals or organizations unless they have consented or are a part of the act," no "jokes dealing with sickness or death," no "jokes dealing with sexual topics in a lascivious manner." And so on. It seemed that the executives wanted Stern's market share but not his material.

Stern tried at times to accommodate his masters, but he was soon on the air doing "Sexual Innuendo Wednesday," and "Mystery Whiz," in which listeners were asked to guess who among Stern's cast was peeing into the toilet. The station suspended Stern for a bit called "Das Love Boot," in which Doc Mengele was running the Love Boat and experimenting on the passengers. Then, in September, 1985, it fired him.

A few months later, K-ROCK, which is now owned by Westinghouse, hired Stern, and he is still there. Since the move, Stern's show has improved. There are still scores of bad jokes, moments of unfunny nastiness, and, worst of all, long patches of self-promotion (the plugs for the movie have been constant and dreadful), but where he has sharpened his act is in his approach to celebrities. Stern shrewdly exploits their need for advertisement—the author plugging the book on tour, the movie star plugging the new release—by testing their willingness to drop all the conventions of the usual interview. What price will they pay for the exposure? The answer, of course, is almost always anything.

Stern has asked Bob Hope if he wouldn't mind leaving him a "few million" in his will. He has informed Ronald Reagan's daughter Patti Davis that he would like to tie her up spread-eagled: "Then I'd take the video out of the camcorder and sell it to 'Hard Copy'—'President's Daughter Has Sex with Disgusting Animal!' " Almost no one ever storms out, offended. When he mercilessly mocked the theatrically effeminate exercise guru Richard Simmons, to the point of tears and an early end to the segment, Stern told him to sit down and relax. "Be a man, Richard," he said, finally. "Let's beat off and smoke cigars." Simmons no longer appears on the show.

When he had Tori Spelling on the program, he did not ask her about the trials of acting in "Beverly Hills 90210"; rather, he gave her a quiz.

"What's the capital of New York State?" Stern asked her.

"New Jersey?" came the answer.

On another show, Stern quizzed Sandi Korn, a centerfold model in *Penthouse*. He began with the category "World Events."

"Sandi, what country did Saddam Hussein invade during the Gulf War?"

"Uh . . . what is . . . Jerusalem?"

Possibly, Stern's greatest moment in this field of inquiry came when he dispatched Stuttering John, in 1992, to the notorious press conference in New York at which Gennifer Flowers was going to answer questions from the press about the "revelations" in the *Star* that she had had a long affair with Bill Clinton. The spectacle was one big balloon waiting for pricking: a wronged mistress going before the half-nervous, half-titillated members of the legitimate press. Only Stuttering

John seemed to have the proper sense of occasion.

"Gennifer!" he shouted. "Did Governor Clinton use a condom?"

Flowers and her handler from the *Star* assumed Victorian frowns. Melendez persisted. "Will you be sleeping with any other Presidential candidates?" he asked.

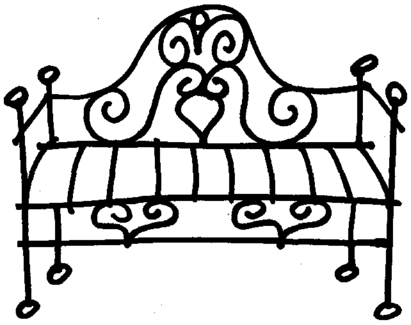
Stern, like Madonna, is usually extremely shrewd about pushing the limits of acceptability only so far. They are both performers who want the costume of the outlaw and the profits of a mass audience. When Stern does cross the line, he explains but doesn't apologize. In 1995, when he aroused anger among some Hispanics for making jokes about the murder of the Mexican-American pop star Selena Quintanilla Perez, he seemed genuinely surprised by the uproar. Even now, he is stubborn in describing his reaction. "I never apologized for Selena and I never will," he told me. "And what is an apology, anyway? 'I'm *sorry*.' Politicians do that all the time. They go ahead and they rob some poor bastard and they go, 'I'm so sorry!' " When Stern went on the air to respond to the ferocious criticism of his comments about Selena, he said, "*Como ustedes saben, soy una persona satírica.*" ("As you know, I am a satirist.")

If Lenny Bruce remains, for his courage, a kind of saint of liberalism and civil liberties, few of his worshippers seem to remember or care that he was not always very funny. At the end, his act was tired, and he was absorbed in his legal troubles. For many of the same people, though, Stern is the Antichrist. His presence on the air is said to "coarsen the dialogue" (that is the inevitable phrase). He is regarded as a particularly noxious brand of cultural pollution. Every time he makes a gross joke about Elizabeth Taylor eating her own tumor—as he did recently on "Saturday Night Live"—the abyss draws closer. Garrison Keillor, a humorist who broadcasts on the baritone frequencies of public radio, has called Stern a geek. "He's the guy in the carnival who ate the live chicken," Keillor said. "He stands there with blood dripping down his chin and feathers in his mouth. How could anybody do that?"

But Stern thrives at precisely the time when what seems to be on the edge of acceptability is firmly mainstream; one could call it over-the-counter counterculture. Fifteen years ago, Don Imus became notorious on the radio in New York by asking female callers, "Are you naked?" Now Imus is considered so safe that someone like Katharine Graham is eager to go on the show to promote her book, and a senator can call in to Imus knowing that he will be ribbed gently and come across to listeners as a regular guy. While Stern has not yet reached the point of interviewing Katharine Graham, he is anything but dangerous, much less a genuine rebel. He is mainstream at just the moment when a majority of the audience is sick of the culture of piety, when the supporters of political correctness are in retreat. (There is a network show now called "Politically Incorrect," but not its opposite.) It's a time when "alternative" rock is what everyone listens to, when the gangsta pose of Dr. Octagon and the S. & M. lyrics of Nine Inch Nails soar past Bruce Springsteen on the charts. Even in high culture and in academe, the cutting edge is what's popular. While modernism was truly counterculture in its time, postmodernism is the stuff of academic grants, campus demigods, and packed lecture halls.

It is true that, like Bruce, Stern is a wildly uneven performer: much of his material is undisciplined and unfunny or simply promotional. Huge chunks of the show are spent advertising one project or another and attacking various foolish celebrities and local radio competitors. But at his best Stern plays the role of the explorer of the boundaries of that standard called "good taste." A vanishing concept. "Some of it is base humor—I don't say it's all that heavy," Stern said. "But it's also an interesting program. It's something different—maybe not for everybody but certainly something of more substance than just saying 'fart' and 'penis' and 'vagina.' I wouldn't have been on the air this long if that's all I did."

Stern does so much sexual material "because it's an honest reflection of how guys think," he told me. "I don't care how a guy comes off, he has these thoughts. We have boners every ten fucking minutes—you can't help it. Now I'm getting older. So it's every fifteen minutes. But the point is: This is how a man thinks. It's not that we're being sexist. We're being heterosexual, and that's what happens. Yes, it's prehistoric, but how much media is there out there that *denies* all of this sexuality? That denies all the sort of interesting, dark thoughts that we have?"



Bruce, during his career, in the fifties and sixties, suffered through the arrests and the endless court battles just to be able to work. (These days, he would be considered mild by the standards of HBO.) Stern has never endured the indignity of arrest or of being banned, but he has been the singular target of the Federal Communications Commission. Over the years, the F.C.C. has deployed its "decency" standards to levy fines of nearly two million dollars against Stern's various radio outlets. The first fine, for six thousand dollars, came when Stern had someone on his show play the piano with his penis. Among other fine-inducing subjects were bits involving gerbils, Pee-Wee Herman, and Aunt Jemima as an object of potential onanistic interest. James Quello, the head of the F.C.C., once said in a speech to the Michigan Association of Broadcasters, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if someday a lightning bolt comes out of the sky and hits him—right in the crotch." Later, Quello told a reporter for the New York *Post*, "I'm almost ashamed to say it, but I find him tremendously funny. He's a very entertaining smart-ass."

When I suggested to Stern that the F.C.C. attention had probably helped him, by adding to his notorious reputation, he frowned. The F.C.C. fines, he said, had prevented him from bringing in new affiliates—they were bad for business. Besides, he was not interested in becoming another Larry Flynt, a cartoon martyr for the Constitution. "Look, my life isn't about the First Amendment," he said. "My life is sincerely about envisioning a guy driving to work in his car and making him laugh." That is Stern's discovery: that the mass version of the great American night club, the rec room, the psychiatric couch is an air-conditioned seat smack in the middle of a traffic jam, and the voice in the car seems like an outlaw but is mainstream. It is a discovery worth millions. ♦

LETTER FROM BEIJING

DENG'S HEIRS

What does one family's story of survival in China over the last forty years portend for the future?

BY JONATHAN SPENCE AND ANNPING CHIN

I—THE ENTREPRENEUR

THE entrepreneur was driving with exaggerated care through the streets of Beijing. It was late, and we had been drinking and talking with him for more than two hours at a club that he had helped found, near the Forbidden City. It would not do to get arrested here, under the weak street lights of the darkened city. The empty expanse of Tiananmen Square was to our left, and, shortly afterward, to our right was the archway in the long, blank red wall that shelters the Communist Party leaders, in their redoubt of Zhongnanhai.

The entrepreneur had bought this car—a swoop-nosed Toyota van—the same way he'd bought his two others, with cash, which he took to the dealer in a shopping bag. Like many well-off Chinese nowadays, with the acquiescence of a government that wants to encourage saving by any means possible, he keeps his money in bank accounts identified only by number.

The entrepreneur, who is now forty-two, is fairly dark for a northern Chinese, is slightly bearded, and has tousled hair tumbling over his forehead. There were few other motor vehicles at this hour, but bicycles still glided by in a steady, silent stream, veering in front of and around the van so closely and unpredictably that accidents seemed inevitable. If another car beeped a horn at his slowness, his jaw tightened in a way that we had grown used to seeing when he felt anger or resentment. But he stayed quiet, staring watchfully ahead, and we let him be.

It was easy to respect his silence, for we knew a good deal by now about his current personal and business preoccupations. His marriage was his second, coming after a divorce, and he and his new wife had an eight-month-old child that was also his second, which caused serious problems under the government's one-child-per-family policy. That his wife is both European and Catholic complicated his life further. In an attempt to make his small apartment both more attractive and more practical, he had carried out renovations without permission, and doing that had led to the threat of a lawsuit from his downstairs neighbor. The growing range of his business interests also gave him constant pressures. Besides the club we had just left (in a mansion dating from the last imperial dynasty), his operations included a factory where he made automobile components that he had designed himself, a publishing venture, a project for the Internet, and a massage parlor.

This eclecticism and restlessness seemed a part of the entrepreneur's own character; they were also symptomatic of the opportunities and pressures of the Deng Xiaoping era, when economic change was possible, but only under conditions of rigorous political control. Those who were trying to make it in those years not only showed an exceptional zest for life but were endlessly experimental and also profoundly ambiguous about the laws that circumscribed them. They believed in law for others, but, in their own lives, they skated on the very edges of the law. When people in China accept outsiders as friends, it is customary for them to speak candidly about the many things that dissatisfy them—jobs, family, the government, the world—but most Chinese would show some reserve when criticizing Mao Zedong or Marxism. The entrepreneur showed no such reserve. He said that what Marxist beliefs he once held had faded away long ago.

"For nearly twenty years, the only education we had was Marxism," he said. "Beyond it we had no other means or words to articulate our thoughts. When we couldn't articulate our thoughts, we no longer knew how to think." He labelled Mao a "bastard," because he felt that "Mao believed that the greatest human pleasure came from the act of struggling against another human being," and that by thus rejoicing in the battering of his people he created a society of "hatred and hostility." The entrepreneur's verdict on Mao was that "someday he is going to stand condemned for all eternity." He added, "I hate Mao."

For the entrepreneur, talk of a rising middle class in China was a pious fantasy, maintained largely by foreigners. He said that China remains a society that has only two main social strata—officials and common people—and he explained it to us this way: "The officials need the people to serve them. When they want something done, they pick up the phone and utter a few words, and things are done for them. The people, in turn, rely on officials for protection and special favors. They are only concerned with how they might live a little better, not with what their rights are."

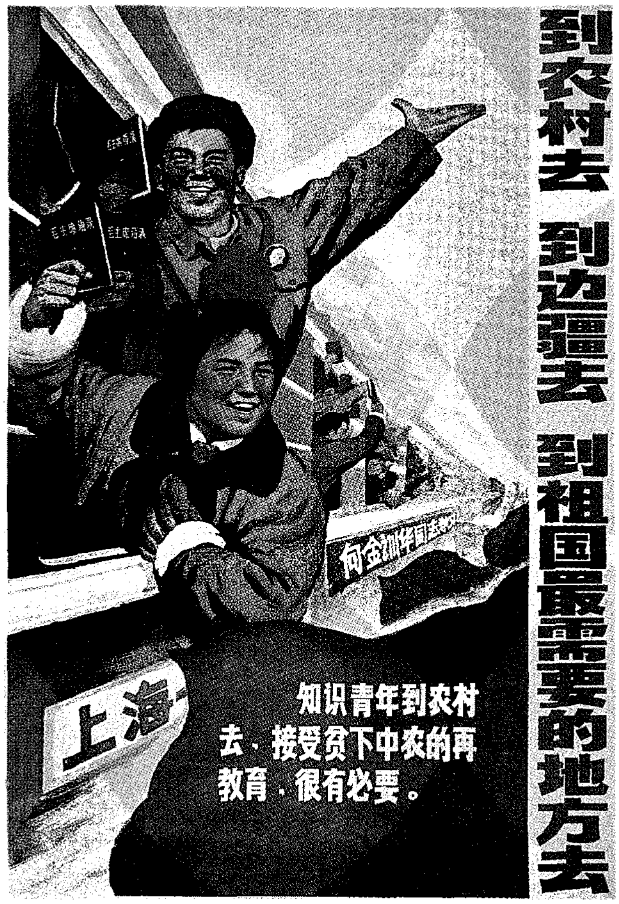
Over the last ten years, he told us, the Chinese had been trying to win some freedoms for themselves, but these freedoms "had nothing to do with democracy." His countrymen wanted the freedom to move about and the freedom to enjoy life's small pleasures, he said, and he added that people were weary of talking about China's future. Most Chinese, he felt, continued to believe, as they had believed since the days of Confucius and Mencius, more than two millennia ago, that "only enlightened rulers and ministers could initiate reform." Thus they saw democracy not as a "right" but as a "grace bestowed on them from above."

When we asked the entrepreneur his views of the present Chinese government, he characterized it as a regime of "the three noes: no knowledge, no law, no ability." As a result, China was becoming a society without beliefs or respect for law, although on the surface the Chinese appeared to be deferential to their rulers. In the entrepreneur's mind, the worst was yet to come. Now, he said, the old-fashioned Communist rule was still able to check the people's rampant energies before they challenged social stability. Ten years from now, he predicted, when those who were teen-agers during the Cultural Revolution moved into positions of power, the lawless behavior would become even more menacing. After all, these were people who had never had a proper education and never learned standards of right and wrong. The entrepreneur's views were not formed casually; they were the result of prolonged reflections on the events of his life, which included shattering childhood dislocations, periodic trouble with the police, and even a stint in prison on a murder charge before he embarked on his business career.

We came to know the entrepreneur and his family through conversations across a five-year period. The more we talked with them, the more we realized that, although their story was *theirs*, they shared with most Chinese who had lived through the last fifty years a sense of the absurd and a deep awareness of life's transience.

LIU JIPENG, as we will call the entrepreneur, was born in Beijing in 1955, two years before his brother, Jikang, to whom he often referred in his conversations with us. The two boys were thus children of the nineteen-sixties, and grew up in what to them was an ideal world. "Our childhood was paved with gold," Jipeng recalled. "It appeared to us then that our life was already decided—that we would have this and that in the future. Our education was Russian style. Most of our teachers had studied in the Soviet Union. The songs we sang in school had titles like 'I Have a Beautiful Dream.' We learned that two-thirds of humanity was suffering, the worst being the people in Taiwan." He laughed. "We remained in this dreamlike world for quite some time."

Because both parents had joined the Communist Party as college students, in the late nineteen-forties, the brothers, when they were very young, felt safe and at ease in the new revolutionary society. Their mother worked for a teacher-training institute, and their father worked for state radio and television—positions that qualified the family for good housing. In the nineteen-fifties, the father and mother lived the life of China's economic and social élite. Their neighbors were members of the Party's art-troupe division. A family of violinists occupied part of the floor above, and they could be heard through the ceiling playing Sarasate's "Gypsy Airs." On the third floor was a masterly improviser of comic dialogue, who at that time conducted his own radio show and could make his worst sufferings into grist for humorous routines. A granddaughter of the former Empress Dowager Cixi lived on the fourth floor; her husband was a renowned storyteller and drummer.


到农村去 到边疆去 到祖国最需要的地方去
毛主席语录
向金训华同志
上海
知识青年到农村去·接受贫下中农的再教育·很有必要。

For Jipeng, the Cultural Revolution, from which this poster dates, was "strange and terrifying. Suddenly, the sky darkened."

The younger brother, Jikang, recalled their childhood in terms of inner and outer worlds: "I remember that at that age we always had skirmishes with the kids whose homes were just beyond our compound. These were children of factory workers, who lived in squalid houses, while we were children of the privileged. We knew that we were superior. Sometimes those children outside the walls would venture into our yard, and we would immediately drive them out with stones if they were discovered."

For the two brothers, this childhood universe was encapsulated in a 1959 documentary made about them and their immediate family by the Chinese Broadcasting Service, entitled "The Happy Family." We had heard a good deal about this film in various conversations with the brothers, but one day during a visit with the family something different from the idealized picture emerged. As Jikang began yet again to recount the highlights of "The Happy Family," and his own role, as a toddler, in its making, his wife shouted, "That's all nonsense! A fraud, a lie to fool people!" When Jikang protested, she continued, "All a hoax. How can you call yourselves a happy family? It was a lie."

Mrs. Liu, the boys' mother, who had been listening to her daughter-in-law deriding the family in front of us, at first said nothing. Then she began to explain to us how her family got involved in making the documentary: "Actually, the movie was not really about us. It was about someone else, the woman driver"—who had a role in the film. "The driver was a famous model worker. The film showed that in China women could be independent and could pursue any profession. What you see is the driver taking a family on an outing, and they happened to choose us."

2—A MOTHER'S STORY

OVER the years, we came to see that honesty and compassion were deeply embedded in Mrs. Liu's character. Both of her sons had a tendency to cast something of a glow over their background, but she served as a reliable bank of the family's memories, and in extended conversations she gave us an insight into the entrepreneur's ancestry.

Now in her late sixties, and still handsome and clear-eyed despite years of travail, Mrs. Liu told us about several forebears. Together, their life stories suggest that China at the beginning of this century—in the years that marked the disintegration of the Qing Dynasty—was already experiencing a social revolution of sorts. On Jipeng and Jikang's father's side, for instance, the boys' grandfather was orphaned at the age of five and was found wandering in the streets of Shanghai by British missionaries. He was given a Western education at the missionary school, and was ultimately dispatched to the University of Edinburgh to study medicine. The boys' maternal great-great-grandfather had been a helper to a Muslim horse trader in the Northeast; his son, their great-grandfather, did not fare much

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better, working as a herdboy, then as a waiter in small restaurants. But the waiter's youngest son—the boys' maternal grandfather—did so well in school that he was given a place in a tuition-free local teachers' college, obtained a teaching post on graduation, and married one of his classmates. The bride was disowned as a result of this union, because her family, which had held official posts under the Qing Dynasty, strongly disapproved of her marrying a waiter's son. She and her husband struggled all their lives to keep afloat and to raise their children—four boys and two girls. Mrs. Liu, the older of the two girls, was born in 1929.

Mrs. Liu met her husband in 1948, during the last stages of the Chinese civil war between the Communists and the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek. At the time, she was a passionate believer in the revolution and had left college to serve in the so-called liberated area of Hebei province—the area controlled by Communist guerrillas. During 1948 and 1949, she and her husband both belonged to the municipal section of the local Party organization. Mr. Liu was part of an enemies-activities team that gathered intelligence in three counties near Beijing, where Nationalists moved during the day and Communists moved during the night. Mrs. Liu was part of an underground-activities team that acted as liaison between Beijing and eastern Hebei.

"It was very dangerous, but I thought it was fun," Mrs. Liu told us, and she laughed. "I was only about nineteen, and I was unafraid. I crossed the Nationalist blockade several times. I was full of romantic notions at that age." She ran away to the liberated area soon after witnessing what the Nationalist secret police had done to a Nankai University student suspected of spying for the Communists: the woman was badly beaten and was then pushed from the top of a flight of stairs, suffering serious injuries. But as soon as Mrs. Liu reached the liberated area the Party sent her back to Beijing to disseminate revolutionary ideas—or, to use a euphemism in vogue at the time, to enroll in the Department of Democratic Square at Beijing University.

"The first time I came back to Beijing from the liberated area, they dressed me like a young married woman from the countryside," she said. "They also provided me with a 'mother-in-law' and a 'baby son' so that I'd look like the real thing. I was so naïve that I wasn't at all scared. I thought it was like playing, like being in a performance. We slipped through the Chaoyang Gate of Beijing rather easily."

" 'Grizzled'—I like it."

At that time, she told us, there were plenty of young women like her on the road. "Women of that generation were different from women nowadays," she said. "We never thought about personal needs. Money, security—they meant nothing to us." When the war with the Japanese ended, in 1945, she explained, "we thought that at last we could begin life again." But their experience of the postwar Chiang Kai-shek regime was profoundly disillusioning. "What we saw was a fraudulent government, unscrupulous officials, uncurbed inflation, and people unable to sustain a livelihood," she said. "And, as students, we also despised the secret police, the surveillants. They paid us surprise visits in our dormitories. We knew that this was not what we wanted—not the fear, not the uncertainty. We knew we wanted our country to be free and democratic. But how were we to achieve this—to save our country? We knew we had to go out and find a new world for ourselves. Did we have any profound ideology? I don't think so. Did I understand what Communism was? I don't think so."

When Beijing was liberated in 1949, she and her husband joined the Army and marched south. "Most of us had only one goal in mind—to liberate China. No other thoughts distracted us. We were simple in that way. At least, this was true of me." And it was during that period when the young people saw ahead of them a life full of opportunities that she and her husband settled into their comfortable niches in the People's Republic and started to raise a family.

As happened with so many other Chinese families, and as the leaders had intended, this world of the happy family (or its simulacrum) came to a shattering end with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, in the summer of 1966. The effect on the future entrepreneur and his brother, who were then eleven and nine years old, was dramatic: it brought an end to all measured rules, guides to present behavior, and plans for the future. As Liu Jipeng looked back on that summer, he told us, "Mao Zedong said that there were enemies all around us, which was strange and terrifying. Suddenly, the sky darkened. All children stopped going to school. I was in the fourth grade, my brother was in the second. The most startling change was that from being the nation’s darlings we became sons of bitches.”

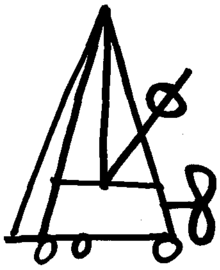
For their parents, the reversal was still more bewildering. “You were not here during the Cultural Revolution, so you don’t know,” Mrs. Liu said to us one day. “It was agonizing. It was a world in which everyone was suspected as either a spy or a renegade. No one, no family was spared. It came to the point where we wanted nothing more than to get through the day.” In that world, violence was arbitrary and swift. “Someone would yell, ‘I’m going to beat So-and-So to death!’ and immediately that person was beaten to death.”

Mrs. Liu told us of her husband’s inability to cope with the Cultural Revolution’s hyperbolic rhetoric and deceit: “One day, he came home from work holding the photograph of Chairman Mao I had pinned on our front door. During that time, every family had a photograph of Mao pinned on its door. You didn’t dare not to have it. The boys’ father said to me that it was improper to honor Chairman Mao as if he were already dead or as if he were a god. He insisted that the door was where the guardian deities, not the Chairman, belonged. I was terrified by what he had done, so I immediately tacked the photograph back up. Shortly afterward, he was denounced as a counter-revolutionary.” We asked if he was denounced for this incident or because of his “bad” family background as the son of a foreign-educated physician.

She waved her hands—“No, no, no!”—and told us that it was because his editorial decisions at the Chinese Central Television station had offended people. Some of her husband’s critics, she said, had once been his subordinates and, before 1966, had tried to “bootlick” their way into the Party. But once the Cultural Revolution allowed them to malign anyone they liked, her husband became one of their victims.

Liu, as an editor at the international division, had been responsible for the commentary in documentaries. Junior editors on his staff would try to load films with redundant remarks, Mrs. Liu said. “For instance, if a film shows a red flag waving in the wind it is not necessary to have the announcer say ‘Our red flag is waving in the wind.’ Another example would be that when the crowd is yelling ‘Long live Chairman Mao!’ it is not necessary for the commentator to repeat, ‘The crowd is yelling “Long live Chairman Mao!”’ ”

When the boys’ father, an experienced editor, simply took out the redundancies, it was seen as a serious crime, “because such deletions were regarded not as stylistic changes but as political statements,” Mrs. Liu told us. “ ‘Why would anyone want to remove any praise of Chairman Mao from the soundtrack,’ they wanted to know, ‘unless he is a reactionary, a counter-revolutionary?’ ”



Her husband’s alleged disloyalty was publicized on big-character wall posters that were an omnipresent part of the Cultural Revolution’s political struggles. Soon afterward, he suffered a bleeding ulcer. He had already undergone surgery twice, because of a weak heart. Now he was so frail, she said, “that it seemed his life was dangling by a thread,” yet the first time he was rushed to the hospital for his ulcer the administrators did not want to allow him to be operated on. They insisted that he “had ideological problems.” Mrs. Liu recalled that it was the doctor on duty who saved her husband from bleeding to death. As she remembered it, this doctor told the administrators, “We have to operate on him, because Chairman Mao has said, ‘We all have to heal the wounded and rescue the dying and practice revolutionary humanitarianism.’ ”

In 1967, Mrs. Liu herself was summoned to her work unit, to be placed under arrest for an indefinite time while the investigation committee looked into charges that she had been a Nationalist agent. Her mistake was to have worked during 1948 and 1949 for a man who later became the secretary of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and was vilified during the Cultural Revolution. From the moment of her arrest, she said, she was defiant.

“I asked them what crime they had convicted me of, and if they didn’t know they’d better let me go,” she recalled. “I said to them that my husband was ill and my children were young, and I simply wasn’t going to stay in a cell for reasons unknown to me—I couldn’t. I railed at them every day for two months. You see, I wasn’t afraid of anything. I told them that since they’d already accused me of being a counter-revolutionary I might as well behave like one—I was being quite impossible. Finally, I exhausted them.”

When Mrs. Liu managed, after her two months’ verbal battle, to be sent home, she found that she had no time for her children—not after taking care of her ailing husband and her compulsory reëducation. “But there was really nothing I could do about that,” she said. “Kids all grow up somehow. If other people’s children could do it, why couldn’t mine? Children of that generation all had to be adaptive, because their parents were campaigned out, or, as we say, ‘exercised out.’ ”

3—WILD IN THE STREETS

During the two months that the boys’ mother was gone, kids from the streets—Red Guards, or perhaps simply gangs—ransacked the Lius’ home and confiscated nearly everything. The brothers were left with no clothes except what they had on and “great big shoes” that were once their father’s. Jipeng recalled it as a period when there was “no school, no home, no safe haven anywhere to protect us.” Children were suddenly “shoved into society,” and it was a society in which “the strong devoured the weak.”

Jikang remembered how daunting the household tasks had seemed to him. “Just before my mom left for prison—this was when we were still in elementary school—she showed us how to make steamed buns. In the span of a day, she tried to teach us all we needed to know to cook for ourselves. Then, the next day, she was gone. My brother and I, using our monthly stipend, bought ten kilos of flour—we were going to make buns. We managed to get the dough to rise. Then we added baking soda. Of course, neither of us knew what we were doing. We kneaded and kneaded, until we were exhausted. After steaming, the buns all came out black. We’d put too much soda in the dough, but how could we have known? And then there was the problem of getting rid of them. Wasting food was a crime during the Cultural Revolution. We were terrified of being found out. So we wrapped the black buns in bundles, and in the middle of the night we secretly carried them to the nearest dump. Once we unloaded the 'evidence,' we ran all the way home.

"After about two days, we completely finished our food supply. The ten kilos of flour, which was to see us through the month, had all ended up at the dump site. So what could we do? The only edible creatures that were free and plentiful were cats—stray cats that gathered around trash bins. It was easy enough to catch a cat, but once you'd forced it to a cutting board it was hard to let that cleaver come down."

Jipeng dismissed his younger brother's specific memories as "trivial things." He concerned himself—at least, with the hindsight of almost thirty years—with what he saw as the broader picture.

"The more important thing that happened during those years was that our character changed," he said. "Before the decline of our fortunes, we were weak, much too weak. So the Cultural Revolution was a real blow to us. At first, I was a victim. But I learned quickly to make the transition from victim to swaggerer."

"I learned first to look after myself and then to intimidate others. Adolescents are cruel and volatile. Very often, they see themselves as mature when in fact they lack reflection. They also like to impress others with a show of strength and nerve. The Cultural Revolution gave us the opportunity to do all this. It allowed us to let loose our violent potential, to be wild and extravagant, to take the law into our own hands."

IN 1973, after several years of incapacitating illness, the boys' father died. "After their father died, for a long time I was gone, simply gone," Mrs. Liu said. "I cried so much that I nearly went blind. And while I was in this total daze my boys suddenly grew up, as if they understood something. I was so shattered, so consumed by my grief then, that I couldn't really look after them or worry about the details of their lives. It was enough for me to know that they weren't killed."

Jipeng was in junior high at the time his father died. "They called it going to school, but actually we were child laborers working in a factory attached to our middle school," he recalled. "There were no classes. We made springs, and we learned to criticize. We had criticism sessions. We criticized this, we criticized that, and then they criticized me. I ran away, and the police came after me."

It was a few years before this that Jipeng himself faced prison—on the murder charge.

"I was fifteen years old," he recalled. "I went to the Beijing station to see a friend off. Like many youths at the time, he was going to a faraway place, somewhere in the mountains, to learn from the peasants. There were tens of thousands of people at the Beijing station, and in the midst of the pushing and shoving we got separated. During that time, my friend was stabbed, and the police arrested me. So, without rhyme or reason, they put me in a maximum-security prison with murderers and hard-core criminals.

"Once I was in there, I stayed for seven months. I was a child then, still innocent and idealistic, and came out of a well-sheltered environment. I was in solitary confinement, in a room that was so small that I couldn't even stand up. In those seven months, I was never let out, to walk around, to breathe some fresh air. There was a small opening at the bottom of my door, and food and piss were sent in and out through that opening. In those seven months, I never knew why I was there. Suddenly, one day, they let me out. The guard asked me, 'Do you know why you were in there?' I said no. 'Just to teach you pampered little milksops a lesson.'

"It was only after I left the prison that I learned why I had been put in there. In fact, about a month after I was arrested they apprehended the real killer and in the meantime they had forgotten about me. From that point on, I no longer believed in the law, yet I knew that what we needed was law. I no longer believed that there was such a thing as justice. I knew that I was there, that I was alone, that there were things I could bear and other things I couldn't bear. But that was it. And I still don't have much of a sense of right and wrong."

JIPENG, out of jail and sixteen years old, began working in a steel mill. Jikang, who had just started middle school, had sharp memories of this period of time alone at home with his elder brother: "Whenever my brother worked the second shift, he would come home around midnight, after having a few drinks with his buddies," Jikang recalled. "He always remembered to bring me back two shots of white spirit and a small container full of cold meat and salted peanuts. I was usually asleep when he got back from his carousing, and, since I hated being awakened from my sleep, he was often greeted with a burst of abuse from me. He took my vilification rather well. He'd plunge into bed and be off to sleep in seconds while I'd finish cursing and sit down to enjoy the food and wine."

SAUSAGES HOTDOGS

Jipeng was often absent from the factory, having become expert at getting sick leaves. "I knew how to force my blood pressure to go up," he said. "I knew how to fake symptoms of chronic dysentery. I believe in science." He devoured books in the nineteen-seventies, but it is not clear how he made sense of his eclectic reading. He and some of his fellow factory workers, he says, "pooled together books we'd been hiding," among them Clausewitz, Che Guevara, and Sartre. The first two had a kind of topical usefulness, but the effect of Sartre was deeper and more lasting: "I liked what Sartre said. Sartre said that there is no way we can predict the future and no way to retrieve the past, and death imposes a limit, so what is most important is this life, this moment."

All this took place between 1971 and 1978, the year when Jipeng turned twenty-three, and he now filled in the details of what had been a restless time for him: "Society was in an uproar—gangs and cliques denouncing one another. I felt that everything was meaningless—the fights, the revolutionary ideals. Nothing made sense."

For Jipeng and his friends, one dream was to become military leaders—"to be able to command others and to accomplish earthshaking events when given the chance." They tried camping out in the mountains and living off trapped or stolen animals, so as to "temper" themselves. He told us that in 1976, anticipating chaos as news of Mao's approaching death spread panic, he and his friends stole arms and stockpiled homemade explosives. "If the world were to be in utter chaos, we would much rather run away to the wild and become 'lords of the mountains' than get ourselves slaughtered by the military goons. It's better to kill than get killed," he said.

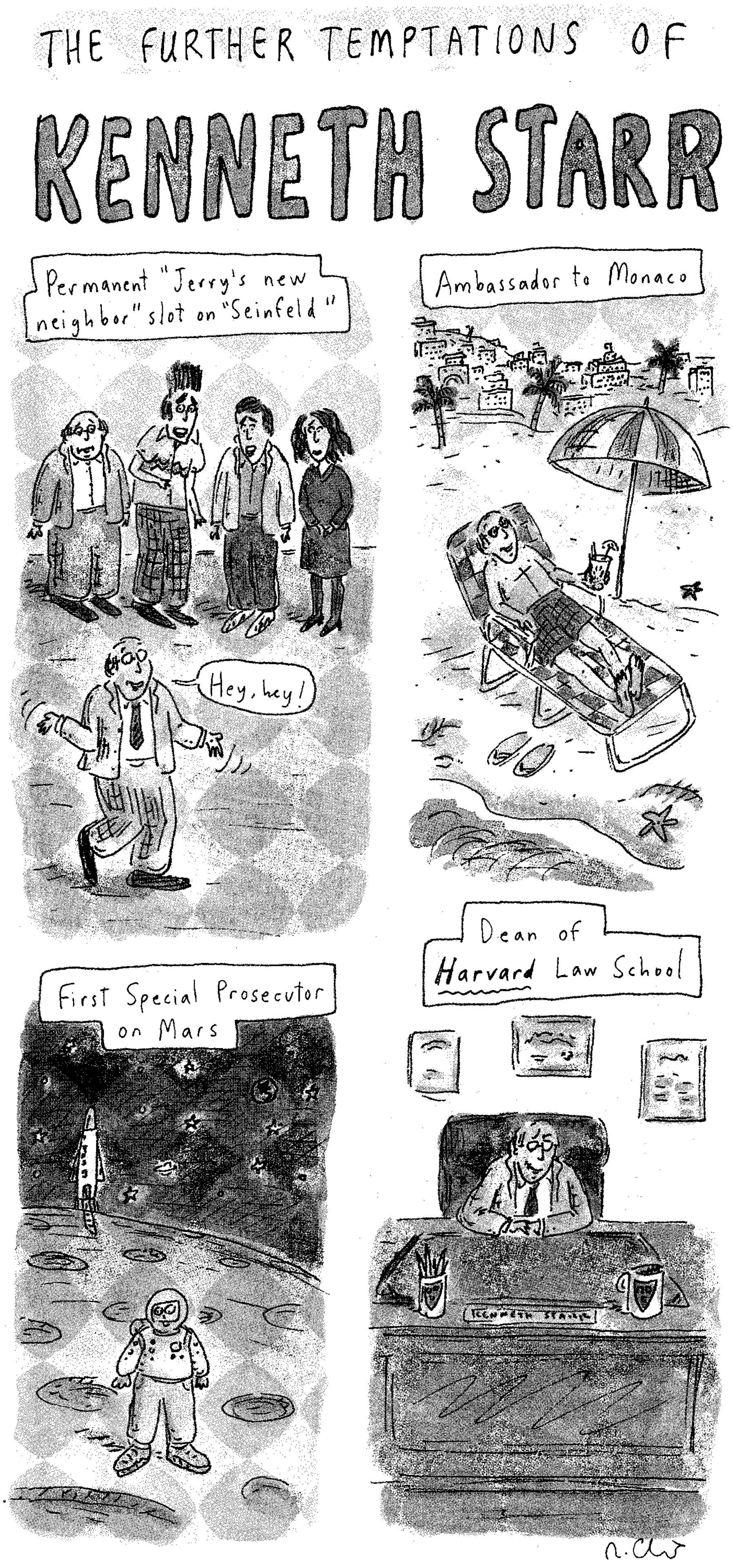
His mother would not corroborate these stories, and dodged questions about her son's troubles, but she concurred with his over-all depiction of the mood in the nineteen-seventies. "If you grew up during the Cultural Revolution, you, too, would be used to the world of violence," she said. "There was nothing good you could absorb, but as a child you'd think that everything you witnessed looked good, everything seemed fun. Thank heaven my older boy liked to read, so later on he was still able to get into a university."

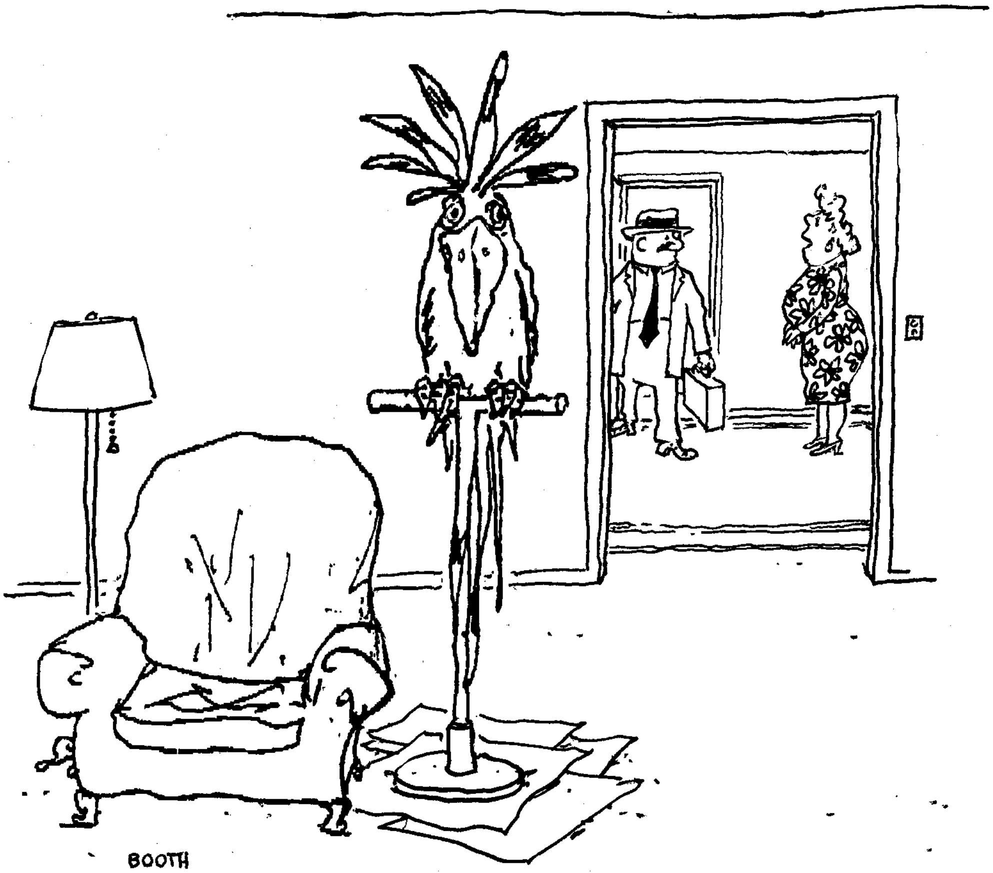
But Jipeng, even twenty years later, still believes that he was deliberately kept out of good schools and denied good opportunities. In 1977, when college-entrance exams were offered after a ten-year hiatus caused by the Cultural Revolution, Jipeng's scores were high enough to make him eligible for his first choice, the Beijing Broadcasting Institute, where he hoped to train as an announcer, but he was rejected by the security check, because of his prison record. The following year, he tried again, and was admitted to the history department of the Beijing Teachers' College.

Immediately after college, in 1982, Jipeng was sent back to the Beijing steel mill where he had already spent several years. This time, he was posted in the education division; his assignment was to teach steelworkers history, literature, and politics, all as part of their continuing education at the mill. He stayed for only seven months. From there, he moved on to a managerial position in the Bureau of Light Industry in Beijing.

We asked if that was a better job. It made no difference, Jipeng said, because "when you work for the state, every job is the same. You drink your tea, read the paper, chat with friends about soccer or a pretty girl you've met, and at the end of the day you say goodbye and go home. The reason state enterprises fail is that no one who works there has a sense of crisis. People don't know how precious time is. They joyfully sit at their desks and criticize everything—the government, society, inflation—but they don't know how to try to change things. The system fosters lazy people."

Despite such thoughts, Jipeng stayed with the bureau for five years—until 1988. Then he shifted to a venture-capital firm that had formed within the State Commission on Science and Technology. This, he saw, would not only bring him closer to the independence he had been seeking but also give him a chance to apply his intelligence and his wits. Although he was under the government's umbrella, his


THE FURTHER TEMPTATIONS OF
KENNETH STARR
Permanent "Jerry's new neighbor" slot on "Seinfeld"
Hey, hey!
Ambassador to Monaco
First Special Prosecutor on Mars
Dean of Harvard Law School
KENNETH STARR



"I went by the pet store this morning, just for a peek."

specific task would be to invest government money in start-up companies that could develop the technology appropriate for their own region. He was sent to the coastal province of Fujian, across the straits from Taiwan—an area seen in the late eighties as one of vibrant potential.

With a hundred and ten thousand *renminbi* to invest (about twenty-nine thousand dollars at the exchange rate current then), Jipeng had the job of helping to turn two port cities—Quanzhou and Jinjiang—into a high-tech corridor and of helping to transform private businesses into high-tech industries. He told us that within three years he and his team were managing ten such companies in Fujian. But after four years he quit. His explanation for this—at times tortured, at times angry—gave us a different perspective on his views about business and his deepening critique of the state.

"Why did I quit?" he said. "It had to do with this assumption we have in China: The more you do, the more mistakes you make. The less you do, the fewer mistakes you make. If you don't do anything at all, you don't make any mistakes." That assumption, Jipeng explained, is the idler's defense of his own inactivity: the idler is jealous of another man's success but is too weak or too lazy to do anything himself. In Jipeng's case, just because he accomplished the complicated and risky task that the State Commission had given him, his superiors became suspicious of his conduct. They sent a team of auditors to check up on his accounts. "Since I had nothing to hide, I wasn't worried," he said. "All the companies I managed had their own books, and everything was in order. What I hated was that along with the auditors, they sent someone from the Ministry of Public Security. This meant that if they had found anything questionable in the accounts they could have taken me into custody right away. So they had assumed me guilty of wrongdoing even before they arrived in Fujian. The audit took three days. They found nothing wrong—I hadn't taken an extra cent from them. Then they changed their tune and began to praise me. By this time, I was fed up—fed up with how things are conducted in official circles."

After Jipeng left the State Commission, in 1992, he plunged into the unknown, for he went to work with a Hong Kong real-estate company, which asked him to put together a development package in Beijing, on a commission basis. The deal was potentially very big, and it was up to him to make the necessary contacts and put the pieces together. When we saw him in 1993, he was in the midst of negotiations and planning, and he talked of his dreams of meeting all his financial goals before he was forty. In his head, he had put down money for a house on the shore and planned elaborate investments.

His awakening from the dream of Hong Kong's munificence was abrupt. "I managed to negotiate for the company a prime site in Beijing," he said. "I helped to find a partner in China for its joint venture. It had agreed ahead of time to give me a certain amount as commission. After everything was arranged and set up, whenever I mentioned my commission they'd try to procrastinate. They'd say, 'Let's discuss it some other time.' They fitted the expression 'Talk big but give a trifle' very well. Every month, they would give me two or three thousand *renminbi*, and tell me to be satisfied. After I raised the question a few more times about the promised commission, they asked me to pack my bags and go. So I came to realize that working for someone else usually means that you have no legal protection."

Jipeng also felt that this experience had allowed him to penetrate the veneer of what was called Hong Kong's independent spirit and to see the shabby reality beneath. "The Hong Kong people have been under colonial rule for a hundred years," he said. "On the one hand, they think that they are superior"—to mainland Chinese—"because they know much more about Western culture, and, on the other hand, they have a deep inferiority complex, because they have been a colonial people. And so when it comes to their own kind—their own countrymen—they are indifferent to them."

When we asked Jipeng how he thought this attitude might affect the future relationship between the mainland Chinese and the Chinese in Hong Kong, he replied, "The Hong Kong people are going to feel a colossal change. They are no longer going to enjoy the freedom they've had as an international port. They are now going to be under China's rule. They are going to feel helpless, and they are going to be depressed. When the time comes, they will have to pay for what they've done to us in the past, and it won't be pretty."

4—INTO THE WORLD

WITH the humiliating termination of his Hong Kong venture, the entrepreneur found at last the world of aloneness that he had been seeking. He did not at first know what to do and, even worse, he had no money. But as he looked about he noticed that there was a shortage of popular foreign films on Chinese television, because no one could afford the reproduction fees. With the help of a friend who had moved to the United States and a friend inside the Chinese Central Television company headquarters, Jipeng cast himself in the role of middleman. He arranged a procedure by which he would be permitted to sell commercial time during selected programs to advertisers, at whatever rate he could get them to pay, while he deferred payment on the films themselves until he had more than covered the potential reproduction costs. Anything extra he could keep for himself. As he had done for the Hong Kong firm, he rode his bike all over Beijing to put deals together. But this time there was no one to dump him: he was his own boss. "I did very well," he said.

He was now one of those who showed their creativity by daring to play, he said; his play was with money, and it gave him power and joy. "Only in the process of creating is a person able to feel the power of being in control, of being in the driver's seat," he went on, his voice strong with excitement. "In China now, if a person is lucky he is able to realize his potential. This is what I think, so I don't want to miss any opportunities. I feel that I must keep going."

THIS idea of "play" has fascinated others in China. Zheng Yefu, a social historian who writes frequently for newspapers and journals and is a favorite on China's new talk-show circuit, has been struck by the implications that "playing" has in contemporary Chinese society. Zheng links playing to creativity and aesthetics, agreeing with Schiller that playing completes a human being, but he also sees that many Chinese have another view of playing—one that Zheng compares to gambling. "There are big games and small games," Zheng says. "It depends on how much you are willing to risk. Very few people play big games, just as very few people would want to emulate Mao Zedong. And those who play big games are not necessarily more intelligent than others." They do not have to be sons of high cadres or men with connections, he says. "They dream big dreams, and they are a bit around the bend."

Most ambitious entrepreneurs, according to Zheng Yefu, "do not have a lot of money to begin with," and so they sometimes have to get together and "come up with a grand proposal that looks new and promises the world." He went on to outline how such grand schemes work: "The entrepreneurs would first get the banks and the vice-mayors interested in their project. Then they would give a big dinner party in a luxury hotel, and they would invite reporters from the *People's Daily* to such an occasion. The reporters, upon seeing the bankers and the vice-mayors there, would give the proposed project a writeup in their newspapers. Then more and more money would come in, because people would think that it was a safe investment." He continued, "In China, the smaller the game you play, the closer you are to being scrutinized. When you are gambling on a big game, no one is watching over you. This is a social abnormality."

Jipeng agreed with most of what Zheng told us, but he did not see playing in a negative light. With some of his profits from the television station, he opened two retail clothing stores with some friends. With the rest, he set out to woo the élite of the Communist Party—of which he was not a member—and especially the sons and daughters of the powerful. Without good social contacts himself, he had to build up a circle of supporters.

His devices were ingenious. He established the club for the adult children of powerful Party officials on a central Beijing site, and rigorously limited its membership, so that business could be negotiated as needed in a relaxed setting. And, at a more direct level of physical service, he set up his massage parlor, staffed by attractive young women and open daily from twilight till 6 A.M., in the basement of a large modern office building. When we visited the massage parlor, at Jipeng's invitation, he ushered us first into a comfortable lounge bar with subdued lighting, where Bacardi rum and Gordon's gin were prominently displayed, along with a range of Chinese liquor. The manager Jipeng had hired to keep an eye on things—a strong and alert former cook from the Party headquarters—watched over the customers and the young women. (There was also a uniformed security policeman on guard at the entrance.) Men in dark clothes and sunglasses arrived, accepting drinks and carrying on quiet conversations on portable phones; one was introduced to us as a police official from Public Security in charge of car licensing, but he did not linger for conversation. A young woman in a floor-length red-flowered dress strolled down a corridor, combing her long hair; other women arrived in short skirts, with high-heeled shoes or, in one case, Greek-style, high-heeled gold sandals. We wandered the narrow corridors, with their small framed prints of nudes and country scenes, and looked into a number of the massage rooms: Some, enclosed only by short, swaying eye-height curtains, were available for a hundred and fifty *renminbi* an hour. Others, available on a rising scale of affluence and privacy, included the ultimate offering, a small group of totally private rooms with extra beds to the side, available at three hundred *renminbi* for forty-five minutes. The money was good, Jipeng told us—a turnover of ten thousand or more *renminbi* a day—for "men love that sort of pleasure."

A LITTLE later, we asked Jipeng some obvious questions. He answered quietly but fairly fully. What the women did in their private rooms was, of course, up to them. Most of them were newly arrived from the countryside, and found the basic wages for actual massage good enough. For some, though, the lure of "tips" was irresistible, and a woman who took such tips might make between a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand *renminbi* a year, more than enough to set up her own small business.

We went to talk with one of these former employees, who now owned a hairdressing salon on a busy street in a prosperous area filled with restaurants and other salons. As she talked with us, she was making up her face, curling her eyelashes, and fixing her nails, and her eyes were watchful. She referred to Liu Jipeng as Boss Liu, called him "an able man who could do anything, who tries everything," and went on to say, "He wanted to send me to school to study English. He said that I was still young, smart, and"—she laughed—"beautiful. He says that if you don't keep learning and are stuck with only one kind of skill, then you won't get anywhere in life."

She had come to Beijing from the Anhui countryside after her parents died, and she had tried working in small factories. Now five girls and a young man worked for her, the shop rent was fifty thousand *renminbi* a year, and she put in a fourteen-hour day seven days a week, 10 A.M. to midnight. She had no husband. Boss Liu had offered to find her one.

After we left the beauty salon, Jipeng told us that his wife had come to the massage parlor once or twice, but that was all. He himself would give it up soon, in any case. The government was launching a crackdown on bureaucrats who patronized such establishments, and new regulations had seriously curtailed the business. And there was something else.

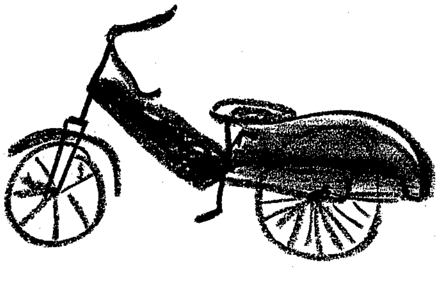
"I don't like this line of business," he said to us, quietly and with apparent sincerity. "Believe me. I know these men who come to get their 'massage.' Their mouths are full of words like 'virtue' and 'morality,' but their insides are stuffed with thoughts of thieving and whoring. And these young women—I understand them. Even if they have done something bad, they deserve our sympathy. Some are doing this to change their lives. Some are hoping to have small businesses of their own. Most are peasant girls who have just put down their hoes. They are simple and pure and good.

"I hate what goes on in my business," he continued. "It goes completely against everything I believe in, all my moral principles. I want to pull out soon and try to expand in other ways. Maybe I'm a hypocrite, but my attitude is: If my eyes don't see it, my mind won't be troubled. I can let go of this place anytime."

MEANWHILE, Jipeng's life is full. He has been working on an invention, which he has had patented, for improving certain aspects of domestic automobiles. In a small basement office beneath his apartment, the bookshelves contain, among other volumes, T. Berry Brazelton on child-rearing (in translation); a two-volume history of the Cultural Revolution; a compendium of tenth-century fiction with modern annotations; and a thick volume on corporate law. He had developed the prototypes for his invention in an engineering shop he bought into in the countryside, but now he was pulling out of that, and had arranged to manufacture the product jointly with a state factory in the Beijing suburbs. The workers in the rural shop would be all right on their own, he told us. They did engineering work only part time, and could return to their fields until the next person came along and built a factory.

Jipeng loved to drive in cross-country car rallies, and was hoping soon to embark on one that would go all the way to Tibet. The Internet, too, offered him a sea of opportunities. Despite the rapid growth of the system, and soaring Chinese ownership of personal computers, there was a shortage of access to Chinese information for the Chinese people themselves; he hoped to establish a Chinese-information library on a special site, bypassing foreign companies, and charge domestic customers six hundred *renminbi* a month for an initial forty hours of service, and impose no charges thereafter. He was meeting with the managers of a large Internet service company in Beijing. If he could get their ten thousand customers to use his library, he would gross six million *renminbi* a month.

One evening over dinner, we were chatting with Jipeng's second wife. (His first marriage had ended in divorce during the turbulent period of the Hong Kong venture.) A cultured and elegant Frenchwoman, who had met Jipeng at a business function, she lamented the fact that in China most people talk only about their work and making money, while in Europe "we talk about many, many other things—music or visits to the museum." Jipeng, who had been listening closely, and also drinking a steady sequence of beers, suddenly shouted, "Do you think that the Chinese enjoy talking about making money—that they enjoy scheming for a living? Do you think that I enjoy what I am doing? Do you think that we have any choice? Don't you think that we would rather be talking about museums and plays, Bach, Mendelssohn, and Tchaikovsky? If it were not for you Westerners, we would have been much better. Didn't you give us Christianity and Marx?" Then, even louder, "And look what happened to us. We end up with Hong Xiuquan and Mao Zedong."



Jipeng guarded as his own the knowledge of what it was like to have been Chinese in the last forty years. We realized that he could not tolerate any outsider's judgment—not even his wife's. Whatever irritations he felt toward his country and his people, he had a right to them. Had he not been hurled into a world of raging madness at the age of eleven? But he had made it, hadn't he? "Now I am on my own, so at last I feel I am alive," he said.

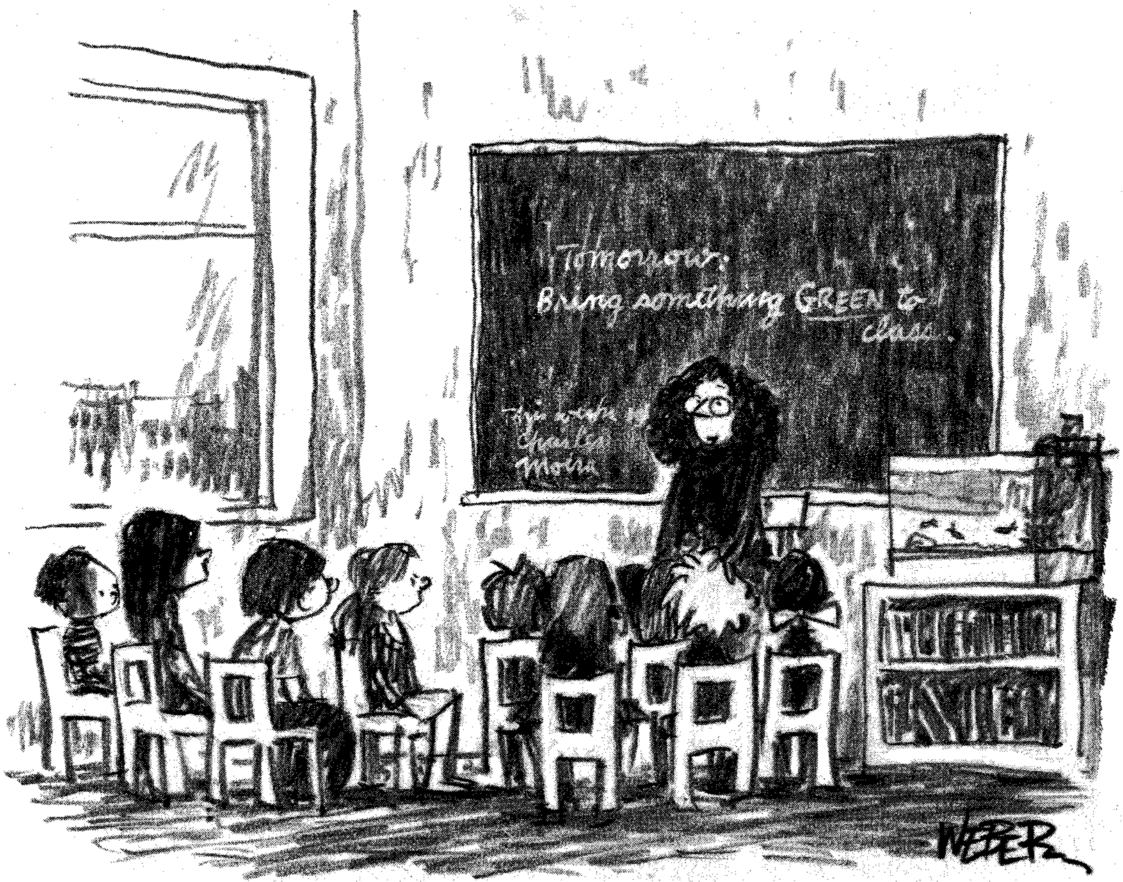
JIPENG'S mother, who had been an adventurer herself, told us that she didn't understand her son's new businesses and did not interfere with his private affairs, but hoped that he was a "decent person." Of herself she said, "I am still a stubborn person. I am not as sad as before. Still, there are many things I don't understand. Living has made me a muddle. Men and women of my generation do not lightly negate anything, because ever since we were young we have been searching for something. We have been at it for so long that we are not going to give up or take the easy way out."

She said that four years ago. On our visit with her last year, she acknowledged that she might never know whether her revolution—and her China—ultimately made sense. "I am not like what I was in my younger days anymore—so exuberant and full of lofty ambitions. I am in my sixties, and there is a sick person at home." She was referring to her second husband, who was dying of cancer. "I've lost my quickness—just can't spin gracefully anymore."

The entrepreneur's brother, Jikang, has had a difficult time in the years of the Deng Xiaoping era, since, though he liked the idea of risk-taking, he was no good at it. He tried many new ventures as the economy opened up, but none of them ever came to fruition. Nor has he had a proper married life, despite two marriages. His first wife was with him only during their honeymoon month, because their work units were in separate cities, and while he was going "all over town trying to get her transferred to Beijing," he told us, she "fell in love with someone else." His second wife left for Germany not long after their wedding, to pursue a graduate degree in sociology, and has come home every few years for several months at a time.

The entrepreneur, meanwhile, has continued to battle the world. His contradictions, born out of a long and difficult past, have become the premise of his present life. They feed his mind and spirit; they keep him going. He never tried to hide them in a conversation, but neither did he work too hard to reconcile them.

"I can do what I want to do," he said. "Nobody is going to scrutinize me. The money I invested in the rural factory is my own. I earned it. The design of this new product is also my own. Every bolt and joint is my own. I conceived them. So, whether I succeed or fail, it will be my business—I am responsible for myself."


Tomorrow:
Bring something GREEN to class.
WEBER

"Today we're going to learn how to deal with rejection."

• •

He told us that the money he'd used to run his rural factory was going to be diverted to the state-run factory in Beijing. He saw himself as helping to support the livelihood of at least a hundred workers there, who would otherwise not have much work.

"This, I feel, is my way to benefit society," he said. "I don't believe in businesses that do not generate economic strength for their country." Later, he added, "In China, we all began from the same starting line. But some have gone ahead, and are flourishing, while others have failed and still others are stuck where they are. You can blame neither Heaven nor men for this."

Though the club where we drank and talked with Jipeng was almost empty, the music was never stilled, nor did the whirling lights ever come to rest. The club's door stood open, but a heavy brocade curtain shut out the summer night, the harsh smell of an open-trough public toilet across the road, the sigh of the bicycles, and the multistory glare of a colossal Western-style hotel that loomed nearby. Jipeng told us that the club building had survived the neighborhood's redevelopment only because it was owned by the Communist Party and had once served as a Party school. Before that, it had been the residence of a group of German missionaries.

The three of us sat in a neat row in our deep armchairs. It was clearly the entrepreneur's space, and most of the time he talked. He told us how furious he felt, on a recent visit to France, to see union leaders waving red flags and singing the "Internationale." As for those living in the West who pretend to be Marxist literary critics, theorists, or historians, he said, "just let them come to China and live for a while, and for sure they would not be Marxists anymore."

Jipeng went on to observe that his younger contemporaries were sick of lectures from the Central Committee, and now refused to listen. But in his own youth he had had to listen, even though the words enraged him. "When they released me from prison, they told me that I should thank the Party for educating me, for showing me concern. What sort of bullshit was that?" For Jipeng, the result was hatred. "Hatred for Mao, for Communist dogma, for all those theories we were told," he said. "But now, I look at the past and I find it laughable. At least now I am able to laugh at it."

While we talked, two young Chinese women stood behind our chairs, dressed in black gowns with lace at the collar, moving only to refill our glasses whenever they reached the precise halfway point. They stood quietly, as if at attention, feet together and hands demurely folded, gazing at a huge karaoke screen and silently mouthing the words from the prompter as soft-focus images of young lovers and nature cascaded by. We recognized songs from Procol Harum, Rosemary Clooney, Paul Anka, Simon and Garfunkel, and the Beatles. During breaks in the conversation, urged on by the entrepreneur, we danced for a time, under the restless lights, while Jipeng watched us and drank his beer. He himself stepped onto the marble floor only once, to sing, with passion and accuracy, a Chinese pop rendering of "La donna è mobile" from Verdi's "Rigoletto." ♦

AT THE GALLERIES

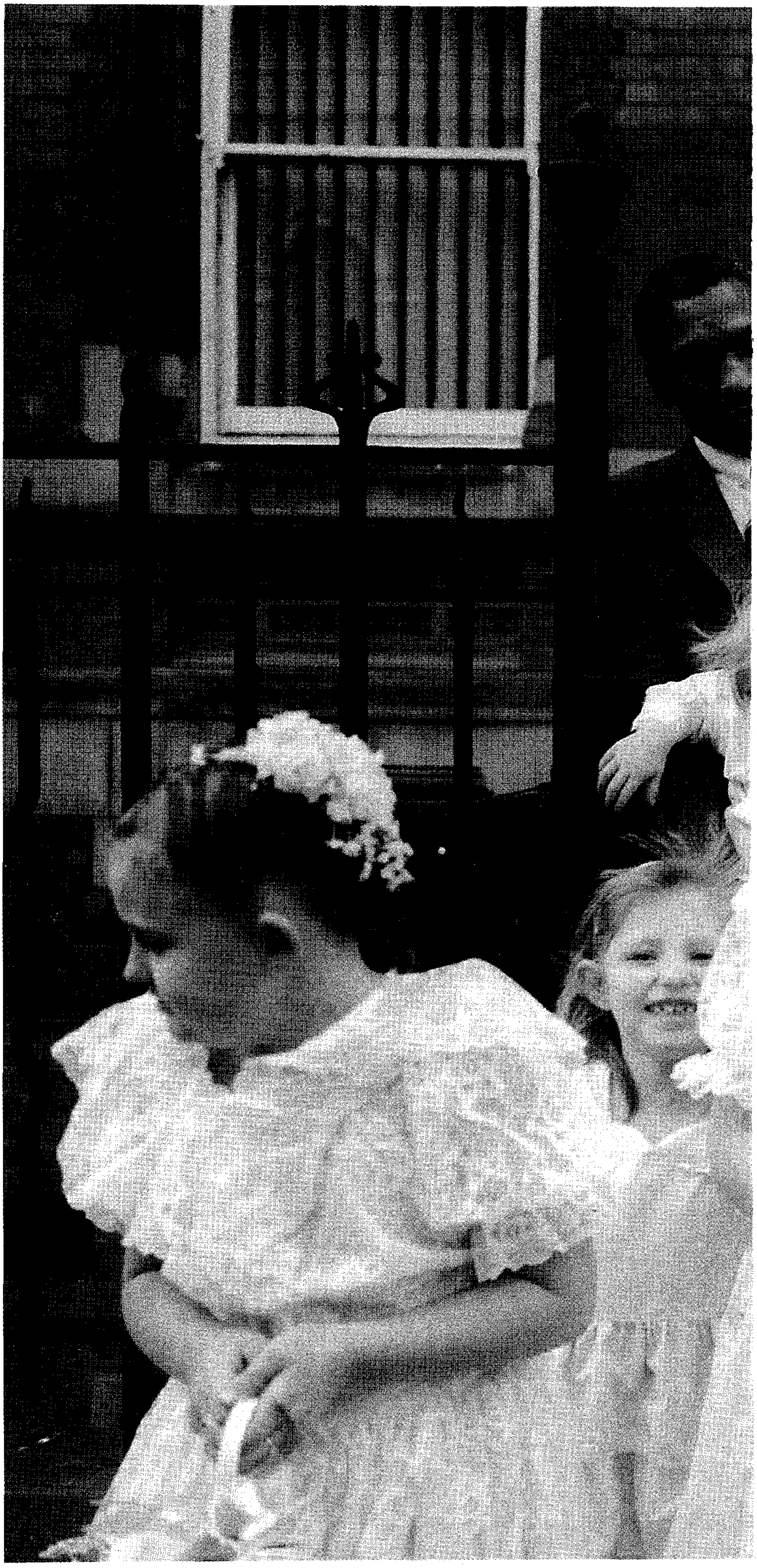
THE BIG DAY

JANET, the bride on the facing page surrounded by her clan, first met Nick Waplington on a winter Saturday in 1986, when she dropped by her friend Dawn's house in Nottingham, England. The twenty-one-year-old Waplington had been photographing Dawn and her family for about a year; a week later, he was at Janet's place, snapping pictures. The fleshly exploits of both families—laughing, drinking, horsing around—were chronicled in "Living Room" (1991), a noisy tour de force of life lived in council housing. Waplington's skewed snapshots of headstands and diaper-changing and bath-taking, with their brilliant flashes of ready-to-wear color and out-of-focus faces, give the "documentary" label the slip on their way to what may be a higher calling—"family album." They're unsentimental but full of love. Ten years later, Nick is a longtime friend of Janet and her five children.

"The Wedding" continues the family story. (The book came out last year; two dozen pictures from it are currently on view at Aperture's Burden gallery.) Janet's partner took off, she met Clive, and now here they are getting married. In the book's introduction, Waplington declares that "the pictures are just a record of the great times we have together"; others have argued that their real significance lies in the photographer's clear-eyed presentation of the working-class poor (and, specifically, of an interracial wedding). Each view is an oversimplification, but together they point to the tension between private and public which is at the heart of the series.

In this wedding portrait, the trust between family and photographer allows Waplington to capture that tension with ease. The formal pose bubbles with pent-up energy; the public screen fails to hide the plainly private emotions. Janet is perhaps about to smile. Clive looks weary, maybe from carrying Janet's youngest, Shane. And Lisa, her oldest, stands sweet and timid, a proud representative of the day's events: in her flower-draped parasol she carries the measured but genuine hope of the family.

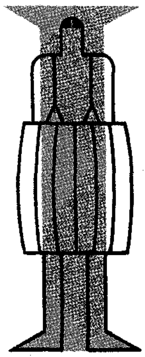
—ANDREW LONG



FICTION

MY FATHER ON THE VERGE OF DISGRACE

BY JOHN UPDIKE



IT filtered even into my childhood dreams, the fear. The fear that he would somehow fall from his precarious ledge of respectability, a ledge where we all stood with him. "We all": his dependents—my mother, her parents, myself. The house we lived in was too big for us: my grandfather had bought it in 1922, when he felt prosperous enough to retire. Within the decade, the stock-market crash took all his savings. He sat in one corner of the big house, the little "sunroom" that looked toward the front yard, the hedge, and the street with its murmuring traffic. My grandmother, bent over and crippled by arthritis, hobbled about in the kitchen and out into the back yard, where she grew peas and kept chickens. My mother had her nook upstairs, at a little desk with wicker sides, where she did not like to be interrupted, and my father was generally out somewhere in the town. He was a tall, long-legged man who needed to keep moving. The year I was born, he had lost his job, as salesman in the mid-Atlantic territory for a line of quality English china. Only after three years—anxious years for him, but for me just a few smells and radiant visions retained by my infant memory—did he succeed in getting another job, as a high-school teacher. It was as a schoolteacher that I always knew him. Wearing a suit, his shirt pocket holding a pack of cigarettes and a mechanical pencil and a fountain pen, he loomed to me as a person of eminence in the town; it was this sense of his height that led, perhaps, to my fear that he would somehow topple.

One of my dreams, borrowing some Depression imagery from the cartoons in the newspaper, had him clad in a barrel and, gray-faced, being harried down the Town Hall steps by the barking apparitions of local officialdom. The crowd began to throw things, and my attempt at explaining, at pleading for him, got caught up in my throat. In this present day of strip malls and towns that are mere boundaries on a developer's map, it is hard to imagine the core of authority that existed then in small towns, at least in the view of a child—the power of righteousness and enforcement that radiated from the humorless miens of the central men. They were not necessarily officials—the town was too small to have many of those. And the police chief was a perky, comically small man who inspired fear not even in first-graders, as he halted traffic to let them cross the street to the elementary school. But certain local merchants, a clergyman or two, the undertaker whose green-awninged mansion dominated the main intersection, across from a tavern and a drugstore, not to mention the druggist and the supervising principal of the school where my father taught, projected an aura of potential condemnation and banishment.

To have this power, you had to have been born in the town, or at least in the locality, and my father had not been. His accent, his stride were slightly different. This was Pennsylvania, and he was from New Jersey. My mother came from the area, and she may have married my father in hopes of escaping it. But the land of six decades ago was less permeable than it is now; it exerted a grip. Fate, or defeat, returned my parents to my grandfather's big house, a house where only I, growing up day by day, felt perfectly at home.

I was proud of my schoolteacher father. If his suit was out of press, and his necktie knotted awry, I was too new to the world to notice. He combed his hair back and, in the style of his generation, parted it near the middle. In our kitchen, he would bolt his orange juice (squeezed on one of those ribbed glass sombreros and then poured off through a strainer) and his toast (the toaster a simple tin box, a kind of little hut with slit and slanted sides, that rested over a gas burner and browned one side of the bread, in stripes, at a time), and then he would stride, so hurriedly that his necktie flew back over his shoulder, down through our yard, past the grapevines hung with buzzing Japanese-beetle traps, to the yellow brick building, with its tall smokestack and wide playing fields, where he taught. Though the town had some hosiery and hat factories tucked around in its blocks of row houses, the high school was the most impressive building on my horizon. To me, it was the center of the universe. I enjoyed the gleams of recognition that fell to me from my father's high visibility. His teaching colleagues greeted me on the street with a smile; other adults seemed to know me and included me in a sort of ironical forbearance. He was not a drinker—his anxious stomach was too tender for that—but he had the waywardly sociable habits of a drinker. He needed people, believed in their wisdom and largesse, as none of the rest of us who lived in the house did: four recluses and an extrovert. Imitating my mother, I early developed a capacity to entertain myself, with paper and the images it bore. When school—the elementary school, at the other end of town, along the main street—took me into its classes, I felt, in relation to my classmates, slightly timid.

He called me "young America," as if I were more bumptious than I was. He pushed me about the town with a long stick he had made, whose fork gripped the back of my red wagon, so that all I had to do was sit in it and steer. No more births followed mine. My bedroom was a narrow back room, with a bookshelf and some framed illustrations, by Vernon Grant, of nursery rhymes; it overlooked the back yard and adjoined my parents' bedroom. I could hear them talk at night; even when the words were indistinct, the hiss of unhappiness, of

ANDERS WENNGREN

obscure hot pressures, came through the walls. "*That son of a bitch*," my father would say, of some man whose name I had missed. "*Out to get me*," I would hear. Who could this enemy be, I would wonder, while my mother's higher, more rhythmic voice would try to seal over the wound, whatever it was, and I would be lulled into sleep, surrounded by my toys, my Big Little Books, my stacked drawings crayoned on the rough dun-colored paper supplied at school, the Vernon Grant figures presiding above the bookshelf—a band of cheerful, long-nosed angels who lived in shoes and tumbled downhill. Paper, I felt, would protect me. Sometimes in my parents' room there were quarrels, stifled sobs from my melodious mother and percussive rumbling from my father; these troubles were like a thunderstorm that whipped and thumped the house for half an hour and then rolled off into the sky to the east.

One center of trouble, I remember, was a man called Otto Werner, which Otto pronounced as if the "W" were a "V." Among the Pennsylvania Germans, he was exceptionally German, with a toothbrush mustache, a malicious twinkle in his eye, and an erect, jerky way of carrying himself. He, too, was a schoolteacher, but not in our town's system. He and my father, on weekends and in the summer, travelled to Philadelphia, an hour and a half away, to accumulate credits toward a master's degree. Having a master's would improve my father's salary by a few sorely needed dollars.

The first scandal that attached itself to Otto concerned his standing on the steps of some building at the University of Pennsylvania and shouting, "*Heil, Hitler!*" The United States was not yet in the war, and a pro-German Bund openly met in our local city of Brewer, but still it was an eccentric and dangerous thing to do. Otto was, my father admitted, "a free spirit." But he owned a car, and we did not. We once did—a green Model A that figures in my earliest memories—but somewhere in the thirties it disappeared. In a town so compact one could walk anywhere within twenty minutes, and in a region webbed with trolley tracks and train tracks the deprivation did not seem radical. Once the war came, even those who owned cars couldn't drive them.

A worse scandal than "*Heil, Hitler!*" had to do with a girl at the high school. My father carried a few notes from Otto to her, and it turned out they were love notes, and he was aiding and abetting the corruption of a minor. The girl's parents got involved, and members of the school board were informed. Not only could my father get fired, I understood; he could go to jail for his part in this scandal. As I lay in my bed at night I could hear my parents talking in a ragged, popping murmur like the noise of something frying; I could feel the heat, and my father twisting in his agony, and the other adults in the house holding their breath. Had there been trysts, and had my father carried the notes that arranged them? It was like him; he was always doing people unnecessary favors. Once he walked out into a snowstorm to go and apologize to a boy in one of his classes with whom he had been impatient, or sarcastic. "I hate sarcasm," he said. "Everybody in this part of the world uses it, but it hurts like hell to be on the receiving end. Poor kid, I thought he stunk the place up to get my goat, but upon sober reflection I believe it was just one more case of honest stupidity." His subject was chemistry, with its many opportunities for spillage, breakage, smells, and small explosions.

The scandal with the girl somehow died away. Perhaps the notes he carried were innocent. Perhaps he persuaded the principal and the school board that he, at least, was innocent. There had been a romance, because within a year or two the girl, graduated now, married Otto. The couple moved to the Southwest but occasionally would visit my parents. When my mother became a widow, living alone in a farmhouse ten miles from the town, the couple would visit her as part of their annual Eastern pilgrimage. Though twenty years younger, Mrs. Werner went plump early, and her hair turned white, so the age difference became less and less noticeable. They had bought a Winnebago and would pull up alongside the barn and Otto would limp across the yard to greet my mother merrily, that twinkle still in his eye. My mother would be merry in turn, having forgotten, it seemed, all the woe he once brought us. In trying to recall the heat in the old house, the terror he had caused, I have forgotten the most interesting thing about him: he had only one leg. The other was a beige prosthesis that gave him his jerky walk, a sharp hitch as if he were tossing something with his right hip. Remembering this makes him seem less dangerous: how could the world ever punish a one-legged man for shouting "*Heil, Hitler!*" or for falling in love with a teen-ager from another school system?

THE country ran on dimes and quarters. A hamburger cost ten cents, and I paid ten cents to get into the movie house, until a war tax made it eleven. The last year of the war, a month before V-E Day and Hitler's vanishing—*pouf!*—from his underground bunker, I turned thirteen, and old Mrs. Naftzinger in the little glass booth somehow knew it. An adult ticket cost twenty-seven cents, and that was too much for me to go twice a week. The economics of my grandfather's house seemed simple: my father brought home his pay every other week in a brown envelope, and the money was dumped in a little red-and-white recipe box that sat on top of the icebox. Anybody who needed money fished it out of the box; each lunchtime I was allowed six cents, a nickel and a penny, to buy a Tastykake on the way back to elementary school. My grandfather did the packaged-food shopping at Tyse Segner's store, a few houses away. Tyse, who lived in the back rooms and upstairs with his wife, was a man of my grandfather's generation—a rather ill-tempered one, I thought, considering all the candy he had behind his counter and could eat for free whenever he wanted. My mother, usually, bought fresh meat and vegetables at Bud Hoffert's Acme, two blocks away, past the ice plant, up on Second Street. Bud wore rimless glasses and a bloody apron. My grandmother did the cooking but never shopped; nor did my father—he just brought home, as he said, "the bacon." The little tin recipe box never became quite empty; I never had to do without a noontime Tastykake. I moved a kitchen chair next to the icebox to stand on while I fished the nickel and the penny from the box, beneath a clutter of folded dollars and scattered quarters. When the tin bottom began to show, more coins and bills somehow appeared, to tide us over, and these, it

"Your wonderful daughter and I would like to become engaged in F.Y. '97, married in F.Y. '98, and, if the numbers look good, start a family in F.Y. '99."

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slowly dawned on me, were borrowed from the high-school sports receipts.

My father had charge of them, as an extracurricular duty: at football games he would sit at a gap in the ropes, selling tickets and making change from a flat green box whose little compartments were curved to let your fingers scoop up the coins. At basketball games he would sit with the box at a little table just inside the school's mighty front portals, across from the glass case of silver trophies and around the corner from the supervising principal's office. The green box would come home with him, many nights, for safekeeping. The tickets fascinated me—the great wheels of them, as wide as dinner plates but thicker. They came in two distinct colors, blue for adults and orange for students, and each ticket was numbered. It was another kind of money. Each rectangle of the thin, tightly coiled cardboard possessed, at the right time, a real value, brought into play by a sports event; money and time and cardboard and people's desire to *see* were magically interwoven. My father was magical, converting into dollars and quarters and dimes the Tuesday- and Friday-night basketball crowds and the outdoor crowd that straggled out of the town's streets onto the football field on Saturday afternoons. (It was easy to sneak under the ropes, but many grownups didn't bother, and solemnly paid.) The tickets, numbered into the hundreds, were worth nothing until my father presided at his little table. He always made the balance right when he got his paycheck, or so he assured my mother. She had begun to get alarmed, and her alarm spread to me.

My memories of their conversations, the *pressure* of them, have me leaning my face against the grain of the wooden icebox, a zinc-lined cabinet whose dignity dominated our kitchen as it majestically digested, day after day, a succession of heavy ice blocks fetched in a straw-lined truck and carried with tongs into the house by a cheerful man with a leathern apron down his back, to ward off the wet and the chill. I could feel the coldness on my cheek through the zinc and wood as my parents' faces revolved above me and their voices clung to my ears.

"Embezzlement," my mother said, a word I knew only from the radio. "What good will you be to any of us in jail?"

"I make it square, right to the penny. Square on the button, every other week, when I get my envelope."

"Suppose Danny Haas some week decides to deposit the receipts on a Friday instead of a Monday? He'd ask, and you'd be short."

Danny Haas, I knew, taught senior-high math and headed up the school athletics program; a short man who smoked cigars and wore suits with broad stripes, he nevertheless was one of the righteous at the town's core. My tall father and he sometimes clowned together, because of their height discrepancy, but it was clear to me who had the leverage, the connections, the power to bring down.

"He won't, Lucy," my father was saying. Whenever he used my mother's name, it was a sign that he wanted to end the conversation. "Danny's like all these Dutchmen, a slave to habit. Anyway, we're not talking Carnegie-Mellon bucks here, we're talking relative peanuts." How much, indeed? A ten-dollar bill, in those days, looked like a fortune to me; I never saw a twenty, not even when the recipe box was fullest.

"Nobody will think it's peanuts if it's missing."

My father became angry, as much as he ever did. "What can I do, Lucy? We live poor as dump dogs anyway." The phrase "dump dogs" had to be one he had brought from his other life, when he lived in another state and was a boy like me. He went on, venting grievances seldom expressed in my hearing. "We've got a big place here to heat. We can't all go naked. The kid keeps growing. My brown suit is wearing out. Mom does what she can in her garden, but I've got five mouths to feed." He called my grandmother Mom and exempted her, I felt, from the status of pure burden. My mother's work at her wicker desk produced no money, my grandfather in his pride had bought too big a house, and I—I didn't even go out and shovel snow for neighbors in a storm, because I was so susceptible to colds. My father was warming to his subject. "Count 'em—five! *Nihil ex nihilo*, Dad used to say." Dad was his own father, dead before I was born. "You don't get something for nothing," he translated. "There are no free rides in this life."

My mother feebly used the word "economize," another radio word, but even I could feel it was hopeless; how could I go without my Tastykake, when nobody else in my class was that poor? My father had to go on stealing from the school, and would someday be chased in his barrel down the Town Hall steps.

DURING the war things eased a bit. Men were scarce, and he got summer jobs that did not aggravate his hernia; he was made a timekeeper for a railroad work crew. The tracks were humming and needed to be kept up. In the history books our time in the war looks short: less than four years from Pearl Harbor to V-J Day. Yet it seemed to go on forever, while I inched up through the grades of elementary school. It became impossible to imagine a world without the war, without the big headlines and the ration tokens and coupons and the tin-can drives and Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour selling War Bonds at rallies. I reached seventh grade, a junior-high grade, housed in the grand yellow brick building where my father taught.

I was too young for chemistry, but there was no missing his high head and long stride in the halls. Sharing the waxed, locker-lined halls with him all day, being on his work premises, as it were, did not eradicate my anxiety that he would be brought low. The perils surrounding him became realer to me. We students filled the halls with a ruthless, trampling sound. My father was a notoriously poor disciplinarian; he was not German enough, and took too little pleasure in silence and order. Entire classes, rumor reached me from the upper grades, were wasted in monologues in which he tried to impart the lessons that life had taught him—you don't get something for nothing, there are no free rides. These truths were well illustrated in the workings of chemistry, so perhaps he wasn't as far off the point as the students thought. They played a game of getting him going and thus sparing themselves classwork for the day. He would suddenly throw a blackboard eraser up toward the ceiling and with a boyish deftness catch it, saying, "What goes up must come down." He told the momentarily silenced students, "You're on top of Fools' Hill now, but you'll come down the other side." He did not conceal from them his interest in the fruitful possibilities of disorder; so many great chemical discoveries, after all, were accidents. He loved chemistry. "Water is the universal solvent," I often heard him pronounce, as if it were a truly consoling formula, like "This, too, will pass away." Who is to say his message did not come through all the classroom confusion—the notes being passed, the muttered asides of the class clown, the physical tussles at the rear of the room?

He was the faculty clown, to my discomfort. His remarks in assembly always got the students laughing, and, in the spring, in the annual faculty assembly program, he participated in a, to me, horrifying performance of the Pyramus-and-Thisby episode of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Gotten up as a gawky, dirndl-clad, lipsticked Thisby, in a reddish-blond wig with pigtails, my father climbed a little stepladder to reach the chink in the wall. The Wall was played by the thickset football coach, Tank Geiger, wearing a football helmet and a sheet painted to resemble masonry.

I had noticed in the privacy of our home how my father's legs, especially where his stockings rubbed, were virtually hairless compared with those of other men. Now the sight of his hairless legs, bare for all to see, as he mounted the ladder—the students around me howling at every mincing step he took upward—made me think his moment to topple had come. Mr. Geiger held up at arm's height a circle-forming thumb and forefinger to represent the chink in the wall; on the opposite side of the wall, little Mr. Haas climbed his ladder a step higher than my father, to put his face on the same level. "O, kiss me," he recited, "through the hole of this vild wall." Mr. Geiger mugged in mock affront, and the auditorium rocked. My father, in his high Thisby voice, answered, "I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all," and his and Mr. Haas's faces slowly met through the third teacher's fingers. The screams of disbelieving hilarity around me made my ears burn. This had to be ruinous, I thought. This was worse than any of my dreams.

But the next day my father loped through the halls with his head high, his hair parted in the middle as usual, in his

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usual shiny suit, and school life continued. "Burning," went another of his chemical slogans, "destroys nothing. It just shuffles the molecules."

At the war's end, we moved from the house that was too big to a small farmhouse ten miles away. It was my mother's idea of economizing. The antique small-town certainties I had grown up among were abruptly left behind. No more wood icebox, no more tin toaster, no more Vernon Grant nursery rhymes framed above my bed, no more simply running down through the yard to the eighth grade. My father and I were thrown together in a state of daily exile, getting into the car—we had to acquire a car—before the frost had left the windshield and returning, many nights, after dusk, our headlights the only ones on the pitted dirt road home. He still took the ticket money at the basketball games and, as another extracurricular duty, coached the swimming team, which, since the school had no pool, practiced at the Y.M.C.A. in the city of Brewer's dingy and menacing downtown. The ten-year-old car we acquired kept giving us adventures: flat tires, broken axles, fearful struggles to put on tire chains at the base of a hill in the midst of a snowstorm. We sometimes didn't make it home, and walked and hitchhiked to shelter—the homes of fellow-teachers, or what my father cheerfully called "fleabag" hotels. We became, during those years of joint commuting, a kind of team—partners in peril, fellow-sufferers on the edge of disaster. It was dreadful but somehow authentic to be stuck in a stalled car with only four dollars between us, in the age before A.T.M.s. It was—at least afterward, in the hotel, where my father had successfully begged the clerk to call Danny Haas to vouch for us—bliss, a rub against basic verities, an instance of survival.

I stood in sardonic, exasperated silence during his conversations with hotel clerks, garage mechanics, luncheonette waitresses, strangers on the street, none of whom were accustomed to encountering such a high level of trust. It was no mistake that he had wound up in education; he believed that everyone had something to teach him. His suppliant air humiliated me, but I was fourteen, fifteen; I was at his mercy, and he was at the mercy of the world. I saw him rebuffed and misunderstood. Flecks of foam would appear at the corners of his mouth as he strove to communicate; in my helpless witnessing I was half blinded by impatience and what now seems a mist of love, a pity bulging toward him like some embarrassing warpage of my own face.

He enjoyed human contact even at its least satisfactory, it slowly came to me. "I just wanted to see what he would say," he would explain after some futile tussle with, say, the policeman in charge of the municipal garage to which our non-starting car had been towed, parked as it had been in a loading zone by the railroad platform; the cop refused to grasp the distinction between my father's good intentions and the car's mechanical misbehavior. "I used to land in the damnedest little towns," he would tell me, of his days selling china. "In upstate New York, West Virginia, wherever, you'd just get off the train with your sample case and go into any store where you saw china and try to talk them into carrying your line, which usually cost a bit more than the lines they had. You never knew what would happen. Some of them, in these dumps at the back of nowhere, would come up with the most surprising orders—tall orders. This was before the Depression hit, of course. I mean, it hit in '29, but there was a grace period before it took hold. And then you were born. Young America. Your mother and I, it knocked us for a loop, we had never figured on ourselves as parents. I don't know why not—it happens all the time. Making babies is the No. 1 priority for human nature. When I'm standing up there trying to pound the periodic table into their jiggling heads I sometimes think, These poor devils, they just want to be making babies."

My own developing baby-making yen took the form, first, of learning to smoke. You couldn't get anywhere, in the high-school society of the late forties, without smoking. I had bought a pack—Old Golds, I think, because of the doubloons—at the Brewer railroad station, while my father was coaching the swimming team. Though the first drags did, in his phrase, knock me for a loop, I stuck with it; my vagabond life as his satellite left me with a lot of idle

THE SNOW LEOPARD

I

I couldn't recommend to you the Elysian Fields
At the world's end with fair-haired Rhadamanthus,
Though there, Fiona, you would still be you, your body
Temperature controlled by westerlies off the waves,

No snowfall, according to the old man of the sea,
No cold spells or cloudbursts to help you feel at home,
No wreaths of frost-flowers on your bedroom window,
No snowman in the garden as your memorial.

II

Let me add mine to all the bouquets wrapped in tinfoil
And tied to the bollard where your car careered
A mile from Sandymount, a mile from where your cat
Curled in and out of our one and only conversation.

III

The snow leopard that vanishes in a whirlwind of snow
Can be seen stalking on soft paws among the clouds.

—Michael Longley

time in luncheonette booths. One winter morning when I was fifteen, I asked him if I could light up a cigarette in the car on the way to school. He himself had stopped, on his doctor's advice. But he didn't say no to me, and, more than thirty years after I, too, quit, I still remember those caustic, giddying drags mixed with the first grateful whiffs of warmth from the car heater, while the little crackling radio played its medley of the Ink Spots and farm reports. His tacit permission, coming from a schoolteacher, would have been viewed, we both knew, as something of a disgrace. But it was my way of becoming a human being, and part of being human is being on the verge of disgrace.

Moving to the country had liberated us both, I see now, from the small-town grid and those masters of righteousness. The shopping fell to us, and my father favored a roadside grocery store that was owned and run, it was rumored, by a former Brewer gangster. Like my father, Arty Callahan was tall, melancholy, and slightly deaf; his wife was an overweight, wisecracking woman whose own past, it was said, was none too savory. My father loved them, and loved the fifteen minutes of delay their store gave him on the return home. Both Mr. and Mrs. Callahan took him in the right way, it seemed to me, with not too much of either amusement or gravity; they were, all three, free spirits and understood one another. While he talked to them, acting out, in gestures and phrases that had become somewhat stylized, his sense of daily peril, I would sit at a small Formica-topped table next to the magazine rack and leaf through *Esquire*, looking for Varga girls. I would sneak a look at Arty Callahan's profile, so noncommittally clamped over his terribly false teeth, and wonder how many men he had killed. The only gangsterish thing he did was give me ten dollars—a huge amount for an hour's work—for tutoring his son in algebra on Saturdays, when I was old enough to drive the car there.

We had traded in our car for a slightly newer and more dependable one, though still a prewar model. By the time I went off to college I no longer feared—I no longer dreamed—that my father would be savaged by society. He was fifty by then, a respectable age. Living his life beside him for five years, I had seen that his flirtation with disgrace was only that, not a ruinous infatuation. Nothing but death could topple him, and even that not very far, not in my mind. ♦

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

WRITING WRONGS

What do the early, unknown poems of T. S. Eliot reveal?

BY ANTHONY LANE

ONE day in the early nineteen-eighties, someone handed me a sheaf of papers. It was explained that I should on no account copy them and pass them on to anyone else, so, of course, I had no choice but to copy them and pass them on to someone else. And thus the early poems of T. S. Eliot smoldered and spread, in unreliable samizdat versions of manuscripts held at the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library. Rumor had it that Eliot fanatics, deprived of writing instruments, had sat in the library, memorized chunks of the verse, strolled to the lavatory, scribbled the lines on toilet paper with a concealed pencil, and tucked the results into their shoes: a legend so completely untrue that I instantly believed it. As I slipped my modernist contraband back under the floorboards every night, it seemed only a matter of time before I would be hustled out of a student café by black-hooded library operatives from the notorious Bergmeister squad, taken to lonely woods, and interrogated as to what I knew about a man named Prufrock. Still, it was a risk worth taking, for the sake of stuff like this:

The lady of the porcelain department
Smiles at the world through a set of false teeth.
She is business-like and keeps a pencil in
her hair

But behind her sharpened eyes take flight
The summer evenings in the park
And heated nights in second story dance halls.

Man's life is powerless and brief and dark
It is not possible for me to make her happy.

The poem itself takes flight, starting in a department store and alighting at last on grand statements. At any rate, they sound grand; so precociously did Eliot school and steel himself in irony that what he has to say about man's life may, like the lady's teeth, have the appearance of truth, and even the ring of confidence, but should not be taken for the real thing. And that payoff is a poser. Who is this "me" making a last-minute entrance? And who suggested that it was either his right or his duty to make the woman happy? Eliot, throughout his poetic career, rejoiced gloomily in the mock-gnomic: in lines that court sententiousness and then leave it bereft, sidestepping with infuriating ease into the genuinely mysterious. "Old men ought to be explorers," he wrote in "East Coker." So what should young men be doing with their time?

Now we know. "Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917" (Harcourt Brace; $30), edited by Christopher Ricks, brings to light a trove of almost fifty poems that had seemed destined to stay in the dark. Eliot trackers, like students of government policy, have grown accustomed to the immanent presence of classified material. There are, for instance, the letters to his close friend Emily Hale, hundreds of which remain under embargo at Princeton until the year 2020. And there are, or were, the poems that appear in this volume: prior to its publication, scholars could consult them but were forbidden by the Eliot estate to quote even the merest sliver. After so long a wait, you could be forgiven for finding some of the verse a trifle underpowered:

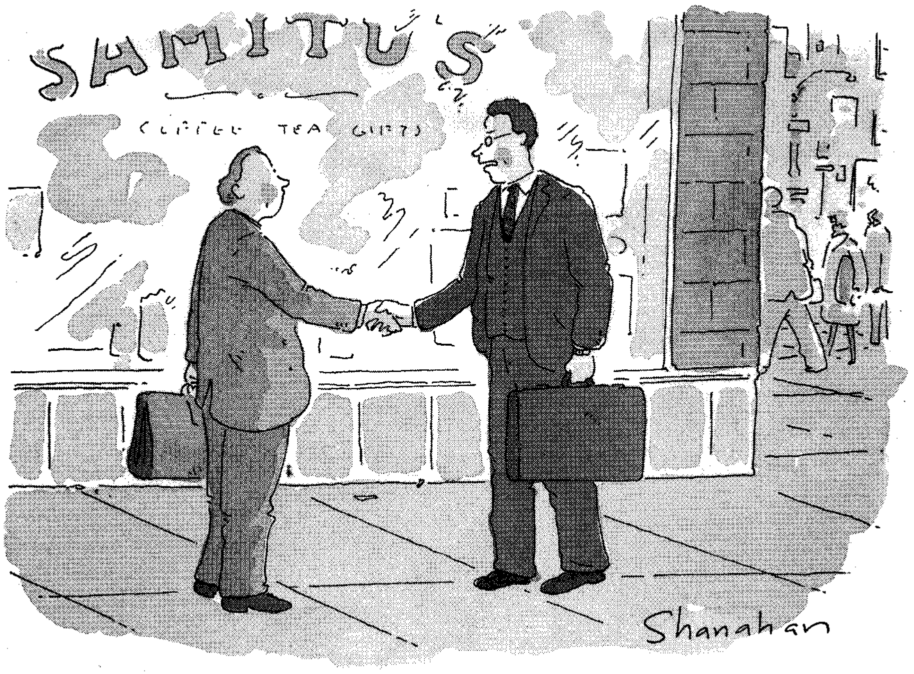
On every sultry afternoon
Verandah customs have the call
White flannel ceremonial
With cakes and tea
And guesses at eternal truths
Sounding the depths with a silver spoon
And dusty roses, crickets, sunlight on the sea
And all.

This could only be Eliot, and yet it isn't quite Eliot. Everything is in place, but he hasn't tightened the screws; there is a lingering vagueness in the verse—"so elegant / So intelligent," in the words of "The Waste Land"—which Eliot would soon dispel. "The vague is a more dangerous path for poetry than the arid," as he said with severity in 1917. Those "verandah customs," too, are surprisingly unpeopled: various figures drift through "Inventions of the March Hare"—dandies, marionettes, ladies of the night, and "ladies who are interested in Assyrian art," as opposed to Michelangelo—but few of them are very lively, or even alive. If one were forced to make a distinction between these rough drafts and the finer finish of "Prufrock and Other Observations" it would not be made on a strictly poetic basis: Eliot's ear was already as well tuned as the young Tennyson's, but what he had yet to acquire was the ability to dramatize—to play all the parts and direct the action as well.

If there are no undiscovered masterpieces in "Inventions of the March Hare," so what? Eliot readers would not expect them, since it was part of his genius—a twinning of his arrogance and his modesty—to refrain from publishing his poems until and unless they were first-rate. It follows that anything left behind was not up to scratch, although Eliot's scratch level is exhaustingly high. Unlike Pound and Yeats, he didn't limber up with lightweight volumes of semi-archaic lyrics before going public with the heavy stuff; he kept his pastiches and his practice pieces to himself, and then, when the time was propitious, he calmly changed the plot of English literature. "Let us go then, you and I": the first line of the first poem in Eliot's first book.

"INVENTIONS OF THE MARCH HARE" is the title that Eliot inscribed—and later crossed out—on the flyleaf of a leather-covered notebook. The earliest poems inside are dated November, 1909, when he had just turned twenty-one. An auspicious time, suited to stocktaking: the poet supplied an alternative title, "Complete Poems of T. S. Eliot," which Ricks calls "sardonic." But it also bolsters the strange feeling that Eliot was always older than his actual age, and was draping himself with a gravitas that should have taken decades to acquire. Just as "Four Quartets" shakes with the regrets and pacifications that we associate with the elderly but was in fact completed by a man in his fifties, so "Prufrock" is, among other things, a pitch-perfect act of ventriloquism by a young tyro who wishes—or finds it convenient—to sound like one of Henry James's flustered bachelors. Though "Prufrock" was not published until 1915, Eliot was working on it by the summer of 1911. Meet it in the company of "Inventions of the March Hare" and you are hit by the un-

Eliot: Whatever charges we level at him today are as nothing compared with the mortifications he inflicted on himself.



"Better yet, why don't I have my people kick your lying butt?"

nerving thought that in terms of chronology, if of nothing else, it rates as juvenilia.

So how come "Prufrock" *feels* mature—as ripe as anything that Eliot, cheese lover extraordinary, ever sniffed? What Ricks's magnificent edition proves is that "Prufrock" was indeed no beginning but the end product of a short and concentrated period of rhythmic rehearsal. "Inventions of the March Hare" is a barrage of dummy runs. It perfects the fine art of hesitation, exclamation, and all the other nervy, stop-go thrusts of Prufrockian motion; there is even a chunk entitled "Prufrock's Pervigilium," most of which was cut from the poem like the fat that Ezra Pound later skimmed from "The Waste Land." The weather that broods over the collection is heavily dusk-based, and you wonder whether any poet operating between 1890 and 1920 was *allowed* to get up before five o'clock in the evening; but, although Eliot borrows the Georgian poets' clock, he refuses to veil himself in their gray mood. Instead, he sifts through a landscape of unlovely junk:

A street-piano, garrulous and frail;
The yellow evening flung against the panes
Of dirty windows: and the distant strains
Of children's voices, ended in a wail.

Bottles and broken glass,
Trampled mud and grass;
A heap of broken barrows;
And a crowd of tattered sparrows
Delve in the gutter with sordid patience.

Oh, these minor considerations! . . . . .

This poem, written in 1909, is called "First Caprice in North Cambridge"—Massachusetts, not England—and any Eliot groupies reading it for the first time will be crossing their legs with excitement. So much Eliot seems to be sprouting in these lines: the street-piano will chime with the same instrument, "mechanical and tired," in "Portrait of a Lady," a poem that fades, as if with weariness, into an "evening yellow and rose"; the sparrows and gutters will greet the early waker in "Preludes"; "The Hollow Men" will put "broken glass" under rats' feet; "a heap of broken barrows" will tumble into "The Waste Land," which will replace "barrows" with the broader "images" and will, for good measure, find room for "voix d'enfants" instead of "children's voices"—sounds that will haunt Eliot's ear as far as a minor poem called "New Hampshire" in 1934, and perhaps even further, into "Little Gidding":

The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree.

If you find all that a bit rich, you should try the Ricks edition, which flatters "First Caprice in North Cambridge" with four solid pages of notes in small type. Forget the poems that it would subsequently father. What about those that were present at its birth? Influences mentioned by Ricks for this short poem alone include those of Verlaine, Hardy, Mallarmé, Tennyson, Shelley, Milton, Longfellow, Henri Bergson, William Dean Howells, and, of course, Jules Laforgue, the poet who most thoroughly soaks the work of the young Eliot. Only a few of them are certifiable sources for the poem; some are no more than gentle suggestions. What Ricks is doing in this volume—and I am not sure that it has ever been done for any poet in such careful density—is to re-create the literary conditions under which the poet labored. The air of 1909 was filled with noises; all that we can say is that Eliot listened harder than most, and all that Ricks can do is offer a précis of those sounds. Sometimes they are nothing *but* sounds: confronted by Eliot's freaky rhyme "Cassiopeia / Explained the Pure Idea," Ricks compares the proximity, in Tennyson's "The Princess," of the word "Cassiopeia" and the refrain "Ida, Ida, Ida"—Ida being the name of Tennyson's heroine. Many will scoff at the thought, but we should never undersell the happy misreading.

At first sight, "Inventions of the March Hare" looks out of whack: eighty pages of verse in a book of four hundred and twenty-eight pages. But Eliot can do with all the annotation he can get. Apart from "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets," none of his published poems are available in decently annotated texts. As for Eliot's critical essays, what a mess. We live with what might be called a Faberized Eliot: reams of the honored sage, morose and verging on the pontifical, and not enough of the nimble young reviewer with his well-stropped wit. You can buy "The Idea of a Christian Society," and you can read his awkward public attempt to be gracious about Goethe ("I can't stand his stuff," Eliot admitted privately), but unless you have access to a research library the short, shocking pieces on Henry Adams or Turgenev, say, will remain a closed book.

No wonder, then, that Christopher Ricks should make the most of his opportunity. Here is a chance not so much to read anything new into Eliot as to read behind him—to wield a "vigilant but never theoretic intelligence," as Eliot himself said of Turgenev. Any fear that Ricks is ascribing unnatural powers of assimilation to the poet, reducing him to a memory bank in a suit, should be countered by the fact that this is T. S. Eliot we are talking about; however much you think he may have read, you're way short. Having said that Shakespeare got more out of Plutarch than most men would get out of the British Museum, Eliot hedged his bets by consuming vast areas of Plutarch *and* the British Museum. The immense scholarly apparatus at the back of "Inventions of the March Hare" cannot be said to make a mountain out of a molehill, for the simple reason that a good Eliot poem is, more often than not, a molehill made out of a mountain.

All of which explains why Ricks's edition is the best book ever written on Eliot. That it is not a critical study is no accident. Eliot once said, "The ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. [He] falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes." If we admire a poem, it is natural that we should wish to isolate those original components; equally, it is indisputable that we shall fail, if only because we can never know what was cooking in the next room when Eliot was trying to write. Likewise, his falling in love (or, if we are talking of his first wife, Vivien, his falling out of love) is a matter of great interest but of even greater conjecture—"hints followed by guesses," to borrow a phrase from "Four Quartets." The only firm ground is Spinoza country, or Laforgue land, or wherever Eliot was toiling at the time. These are the areas that can be mapped, without presumption, by editors and critics, and no one is more skilled than Ricks at covering the ground. Eliot said that the poems in "Inventions of the March Hare" were "unpublished and unpublishable," and it is a pleasure to see him, on both counts, proved wrong.

THERE are those, of course, who think that Eliot was wrong pretty much all the time. When "Inventions of the March Hare" came out in England last year, it made waves in some of the newspapers. Not because of a sudden surge in the public taste for vers libre but because of lines like this:

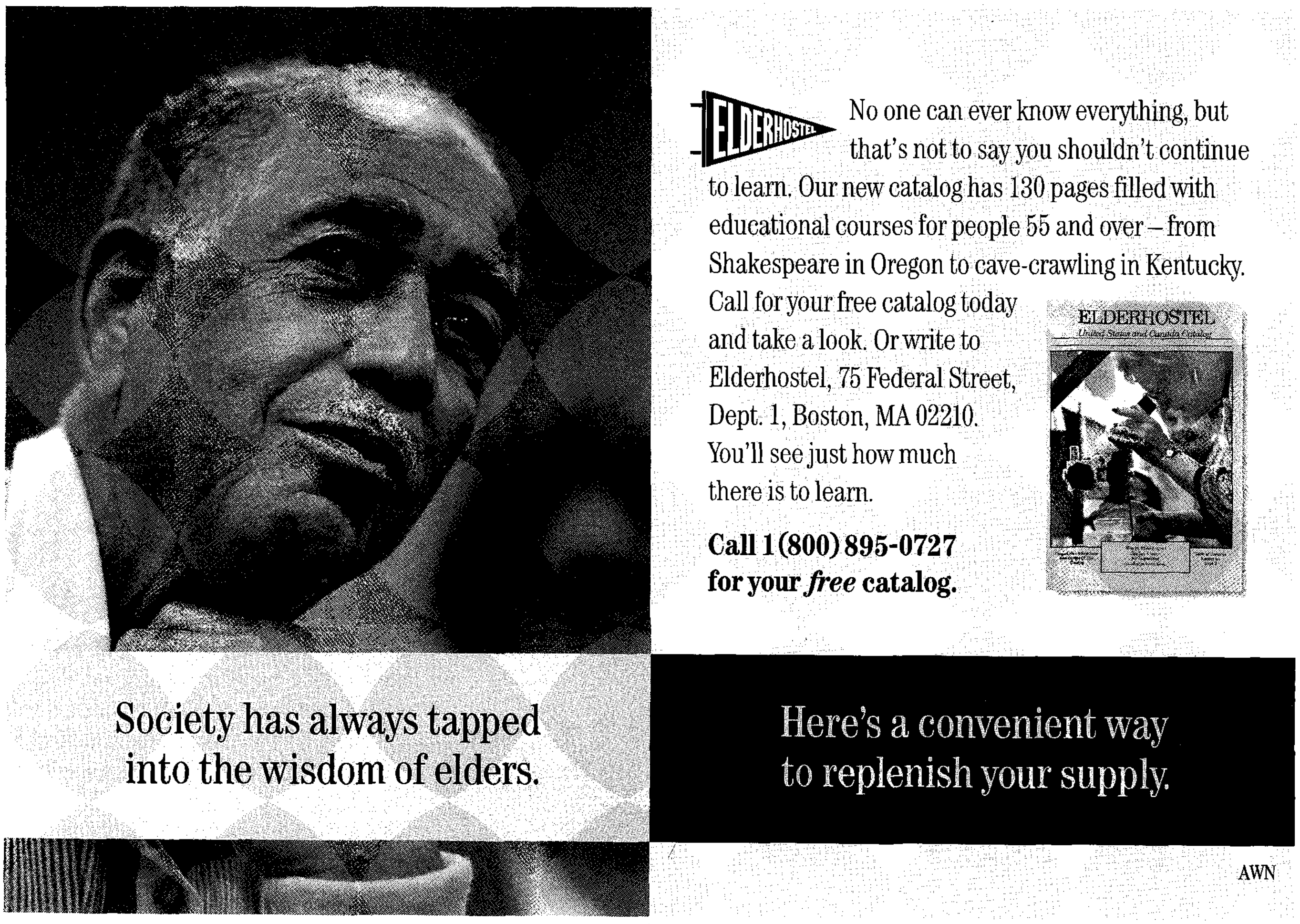
> Bolo's big black bastard queen
> Was *so* obscene
> She shocked the folk of Golder's Green.

Which shows what happens when vers becomes too libre for its own good. The rhyme, which manages in a short space to insult both blacks and Jews (Golders Green, a suburb of North London, has a strong Jewish community), forms part of Appendix A to Ricks's edition. He prints a selection of Eliot's dirty verses, none of them published in the poet's lifetime. "The editor is aware that such scabrous exuberances may lend themselves to either the wrong kind or the wrong amount of attention," Ricks writes. You bet they may. Poor Tom was a fogey, a bigot, a woman-hater, and an anti-Semite, but now it turns out that he laughed at blacks, too. How's that for a full house?

There is much in "Inventions of the March Hare" that will cause the poetry police to twitch their batons in anticipation. A poem called "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" contains the rhyme "strangled you" / "mangled you" and the sheer physical weirdness of

> I would come with a towel in my hand
> And bend your head beneath my knees;

which suggests, if not calculated sadism, a certain tinge of the bathhouse. You begin to wonder whether the courteous Eliot held back from publishing some of these verses



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for fear that they would turn weak stomachs:

> Do I know how I feel? Do I know how I think?
> There is something which should be firm
> but slips, just at my finger tips.
> There will be a smell of creolin and the
> sound of something that drips
> A black bag with a pointed beard and
> tobacco on his breath
> With chemicals and a knife
> Will investigate the cause of death that was
> also the cause of the life—

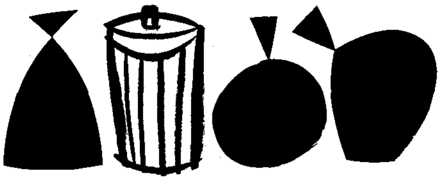
The poet who once attended a fancy-dress party in the guise of Dr. Crippen never lost his taste for the macabre, and this passage, in its pungent domestic horror, feels seriously nasty. The stink of it will filter through to "Sweeney Agonistes," but Eliot could scarcely improve on the hard metaphysical punch of that final line. It sets in train a long process of investigation, culminating with "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men," into the extent to which life itself can kill.

The ditty about the black queen, however, is of an entirely different order. To begin with, like most of the "exuberances," it is negligible as poetry; there is nothing to it except the sneer. What is more, we have seen it before. It appeared in a letter to James Joyce in 1921 and was published in 1988 in the first volume of the poet's letters, edited by his widow, Valerie Eliot. Little fuss was made then. Eliot scholars had long known of his weakness for the scurrilous and the racist: it was, however regrettable, part of the scenery. What changed everything was the appearance last year of "T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form," by Anthony Julius. At once urgent and scrupulous, Julius's book is powered by the contention that Eliot's attitude toward Jews *was* the scenery. Julius doesn't have much to go on, but it's enough. Exhibits include the scarcely believable moment in "After Strange Gods" when Eliot says that "reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable," a passage from "Gerontion," and these lines from "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar":

> The rats are underneath the piles.
> The jew is underneath the lot.
> Money in furs.

The lowercase "j" was quietly capitalized in later editions, as if the damage could be undone typographically. "Burbank" is not a dramatic monologue, so there is little point in trying to cloak the slur within the mind of a putative character, or in disputing the animosity that prevails. What needs to be measured is the extent of that animosity. Julius does something rather Ricks-like with it: he reaches behind a handful of instances to disclose an entire history of prejudice—a wide tradition of contempt that narrowed to Eliot's individual talent. One hardly knows how to plumb the irony of the fact that Eliot particularly enjoyed reading his poetry to the Young Men's Hebrew Association in New York. "A very good, responsive audience," he said.

Julius is a lawyer by trade; for those who enjoy the frisson of such things, he represented Princess Diana in her divorce case. "T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form" is a barrister's book: it succeeds less as literary criticism than as tireless cross-examination and withering summation. There are times when he pushes too hard. If, following Julius, you charge Eliot with anti-Semitism on the ground that he disparaged Freud, what are you going to do with a writer like Nabokov, whose anti-Freudian mockery was far more relentless but who also had to be dissuaded from throwing someone out of his house for making an anti-Semitic remark? More disturbing still is Julius's basic terminology. Every time he uses an apparently unexceptional phrase such as "Eliot's anti-Semitic poetry," or when he says that "Gerontion" is "an anti-Semitic poem," he is making a scary aesthetic assumption. To be blunt, how much loathing of Jews, covert or explicit, does a work of art have to display before we label it anti-Semitic? For that matter, how much love do you need to make a love poem? The word "jew" appears only once in "Gerontion," but Julius would argue that the tone is vicious enough to stain the whole poem. This seems to me unworkable: in saying that a poem is anti-Semitic, Julius implies that its drive—its essential purpose—is the denigration of Jews, whereas "Gerontion," the curtain call of the dramatic monologue, is a poem that splinters with helpless images of crackup and dislocation. Among them is what Julius terms "that most fatigued of cultural clichés, the Wandering Jew," but it does not overwhelm the poem as a whole, unless you want it to do so. These are rueful matters: I have long considered "Gerontion" one of the greatest short poems in the language, comparable—in more ways than one—to Tennyson's "Tithonus," but now I feel I should read it under the bedclothes. Does my history of reverence for the poem make me a suspect, too?



It is entirely to the credit of Anthony Julius that he should prod us to ask such questions. He inspects and prosecutes the anti-Semitism while never maintaining that Eliot was anything but a great poet. Would that such equipoise had transferred itself to his readers. Since the book was published, they have lined up in battle—and, indeed, created battle where none should exist. The critic Hugh Kenner launched a blustery defense of the poet in the *National Review*, while writers such as Frederic Raphael, Will Self, and James Fenton have sprung to the attack. In a lecture, Fenton called Eliot "a scoundrel," as if planning to horsewhip the fellow on the steps of a London club.

One must admit that there is something about Eliot, beyond the fact of his political opinions, that seems to encourage such assaults. They are nothing new. In 1949, he was among the Fellows of the Library of Congress who gave the Bollingen Prize to Ezra Pound for "The Pisan Cantos." Pound, who had been charged with treason after his wartime activities, was being held in an asylum, and the award met with outrage. According to Eliot's biographer Peter Ackroyd, "Although Eliot was only one member of a jury which included Robert Lowell, W. H. Auden, Conrad Aiken and Katherine Anne Porter, he was singled out for abuse: in fact, he seemed to receive more than Pound himself." The *Saturday Review* bemoaned the "intellectual neo-fascism" of "this rootless expatriate."

That last attack cuts peculiarly deep: it evokes, after all, one of the traditional rallying cries of the anti-Semite. (How much self-loathing lay at the root of Eliot's anti-Semitism, given his own undeniable tendency to belong everywhere and nowhere—to wander like one of his own parodies of Jewishness—is a nicety that needs to be handled with care.) There were Americans who could not forgive Eliot for his Jamesian transplantation to the Old World; similarly, in the clamor of his current enemies I sense a mockery of his efforts to become an honorary Englishman. The comparison with Pound is fruitful: nobody complains much about Pound's anti-Semitism, because he flourished it so openly and madly—good old Ez, him and his loony tunes! But Eliot, the smoothy whose whole career was an inside job, demands to be unmasked: his Englishness should be torn aside, his courtesy revealed as cowardice, and, above all, the coolness and distance of his verse reread as a front for emotional torment and the hiss of racial spite. Anyone who announces, as Eliot did, that poetry is an escape from personality can expect, now more than ever, to have his personality ripped open like a fox. The trouble with "T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form" is that by the time its delicate judgments trickle down into journalism—or, even worse, into colleges—they will have hardened into thirdhand dogma. Philip Larkin was the first to get this treatment—some students would rather think of him as a racist with a palate for pornography than read his poems—and there is every danger that Eliot is now in the process of being Larkinized. His anti-Semitism will become the preëminent symptom in his case history: Eliot was a hater, and therefore it is meet and right that we should hate him back.

THIS is, you may say, unsatisfactory. What is most depressing about the Eliot issue is the moral vanity that seems to have crept into our reading habits—the demand that authors confirm our own convictions. Is it too much to ask that we should entertain mixed feelings about a writer? I suspect that no other feelings are worth having; that a writer who arouses clean, uncomplicated feelings will, in the final reckoning, turn out to be unworthy of serious attention; and that Eliot offers us a strong opportunity to revive the ancient art of being of two minds. "I think of a man whom I held in respect and admiration, although some of his views were exasperating and some deplorable—but a great writer," Eliot once wrote, adding, "It is easy to criticize a man for not being another man than the man he was." This is a test case, because the man in question was Charles Maurras—a very nasty piece of work, fuel to the flame of the nationalist *L'Action Française* and, it has been claimed, of Eliot's own anti-Semitism. And yet Eliot's final judgment is clear: lousy in parts, but a great writer. Sounds reasonable to me.

If, on the other hand, such a distinction strikes you as evasive and naïve, you've got your work cut out. All literature lies before you, awaiting your pronouncements. Once we begin to chastise poets for what they believed, what they cried in public declarations or murmured in idle moments, who should 'scape whipping? Having surveyed the sins of the leading poets in the language, I have come to the unlikely conclusion that the only one who can be honored with impunity is George Herbert. If you refuse to read anyone you disapprove of, I should warn you that you'll end up spending an awful lot of time with "The Temple"—a wonderful work, but still. It may be wiser, or more practical, to operate on the principle that poets engage our attention not merely in spite of their vices, sexual and political, but precisely because of what they do with them: because of the dramatizing, or the alchemical transmutation, of deep flaw into yet profounder form. I am not sure that I would be interested—would really believe—in

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> And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
> Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm
> Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
> Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.

So runs the terza rima of "Little Gidding," prompting the suspicion that whatever charges we level at Eliot today are as nothing compared with the fierce mortifications that he inflicted on himself. The Dantean perfection of this verse, the tidal sway of its disclosure, should not blind us to the fact that it is both salt and wound. Even the reader who finds T. S. Eliot unforgivable will pause to hear such a confession. Eliot was known to friends in later life as the Possum, adept at playing dead, and sometimes as the Elephant: unable to forget. That may be a literary prerequisite, but to the private Eliot, guilty of ethnic prejudice and the only survivor of a shipwrecked marriage, a long memory probably felt like hell. After he died, in 1965, his ashes were taken to the church at East Coker, the home of his ancestors and the scene, or starting point, of the second of his "Four Quartets." On a plaque are the words "Of your charity pray for the repose of the soul of Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet." The Eliot whom we read today is changed, though not utterly, from the poet who was esteemed by previous generations. Yet the poetry remains as unquiet as ever, the souls that patrol it allowed only meagre repose; the more we learn of Eliot, indeed, and the more we try to read between the lines, the more desperate are the snatches of happiness that we glimpse there. The March Hare may have jumped, but not for joy. ♦

THE WONDER YEARS

A twelve-year-old girl's excellent adventure.

BY STEPHEN SCHIFF

BACK in the vanished, mythic time that the heroine of Brian Hall's beautiful new novel, "The Saskiad" (Houghton Mifflin; $22.95), pictures herself in, epics meant what they said. Real heroes battled real monsters; mortals were seduced by living, breathing gods; and to be caught between Scylla and Charybdis wasn't mere metaphor. The classical epic took place not in the world of ideas but in an external, visible, literal world. By the beginning of this century, however, as the middle class grew vast and the influence of Freud and Jung spread, men had famously come to lead lives not of virile derring-do but of quiet desperation, and the epic necessarily turned inward. The Odyssey abandoned Homer's islands and seas to become Joyce's "Ulysses," a journey of the psyche which took place within a single town on a single day.

Brian Hall

That transformation of the Homeric external into the Joycean internal remains perhaps the most consequential literary event of the twentieth century, yet "The Saskiad" takes it a step further. Brian Hall's conceit is that the tales that have molded what could once be unblushingly called Western Civilization have also molded the inner world of a precocious twelve-year-old girl, who has steeped herself in them. Saskia White views her humdrum life on a tatty, dope-hazed ex-commune in upstate New York as a thunderous saga, with herself as the ambisexual heroine and the members of her fraying extended family as exalted figures out of her favorite books: the Odyssey, "The Travels of Marco Polo," "Moby Dick," the Horatio Hornblower novels, various works on heraldry and alchemy, and, of all things, a biography by J. L. E. Dreyer of the sixteenth-century astronomer Tycho Brahe. (The communards obviously don't own a TV.) And Hall has patterned "The Saskiad" after the Odyssey, but with an adolescent female version of Telemachus, Odysseus's son, in the central role. Hall's Penelope is Saskia's mother, Lauren, an organic farmer who, like her antecedent, does a "waiting job in Ithaca," and the book's Odysseus is Saskia's mysterious father, Thomas, a self-styled eco-commando who has ditched his family in order to wander the earth, hounding whalers, dam builders, and anyone else he deems insufficiently green.

Bright children often experience adolescence as high drama (that's what TV shows such as "My So-Called Life" and "The Wonder Years" were trying to capture), but when they commit their inner churnings to the page they generally wind up with the self-absorbed prattle of high-school diaries and junior odes to puppy love. Not Saskia. Instead of composing her own language from scratch, she speaks in a pastiche of received languages, most of them—like the shards of the Odyssey that crop up everywhere—grandiose, stilted, and unexpectedly lovely. When Saskia has trouble getting her adopted siblings out of bed, she grouses to herself about the crew that "the Admiralty sends her"; when she opens her mother's sewing basket, she is instantly transported to a dusty bazaar somewhere "south of Cathay." Hall captures a child's inflated sense of urgency without making the child herself nauseating—but also without sacrificing the comedy in Saskia's overblown descriptions of family breakfast squabbles, schoolyard crushes, and the daily milking of Marilyn, the communal cow.

"The Saskiad" is written in the present tense and the third person. Those are typically the tools of the writer of magazine profiles—useful for providing immediacy, intimacy, and the occasional ironic wink. Hall uses them to make it seem as though Saskia were doing a reporting job on her own life, and they give him the opportunity to shift textures and tones very artfully, often within a single sentence. Here is a masterly passage, for instance, about hair:

> Mim's hair is thick, burnt umber, pert, hey-you-guys hair. Jane's hair is elegant, gleaming, ruler-straight, obsidian. But Lauren's hair, one must concede, sweeps all before it. As long as Jane's, as bushy as Mim's, and of a color indescribable even for Saskia, who knows all the color words. It might crudely be called auburn, but it has claims on copper and bronze. . . .When you sink your hand into it you imagine you will draw it back out swirled in hues like an Easter egg.

That "one must concede" is something Saskia read in a book somewhere; the "knows all the color words" is boasting in front of grownups; the "hey-you-guys" is a playground come-on. And it all culminates in the last sentence, which clicks into the second person and, simultaneously, into a new, poetic intimacy.

But "The Saskiad" is much more than a linguistic diversion. Hall is thirty-seven, and this is only his second novel (his first, "The Dreamers," was well received but little read when it appeared, in 1989; he has also written two travel books), yet he already knows all about harnessing stylistic experimentation to narrative and character. Saskia's voice, for instance, evolves as she does. The first third of the book is about her blossoming love for a new girl at school—silky, willowy Jane Singh, whom she celebrates with effusions worthy of a medieval minstrel. (Hall is canny enough to let us see, through all Saskia's mooning and moaning, that Jane may not be the sublime soulmate Saskia takes her for: while Saskia resorts to Homer in her fantasies, Jane resorts to Spider-Man.) Then, in the book's second third, Saskia's long-lost father, Thomas, takes her and Jane on a trek through Norway to fight some obscure eco-battle. It is Saskia's real-life odyssey, her first chance to match the flamboyant language of her inner world with an actual adventure. The two don't fit, of course, and Saskia can't help being shaken by their disjunction. Her language grows tougher and more Melvillean, even as Thomas emerges as darker, more obsessive, and more dangerous than we had imagined.

But when Saskia and Jane entice this compromised Odysseus back home to Ithaca, Hall reveals another dexterous twist: not all the book's prevailing fables are the ones Saskia has picked up from her reading. Thomas, too, has been spinning yarns, and so have the gnarled communards he abandoned. In the end, Saskia's coming of age becomes a reckoning with the entire sea of stories she has spent her life floating in. As the book reaches its closing chapters, her voice changes once again—this time into something less spectacular but also less mannered and pretentious. It is a plain, smart, honest voice, and it is, at last, entirely her own. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Le Divorce, by Diane Johnson (Dutton; $23.95). When Isabel, a feckless California girl, stays in Paris to help her newly deserted pregnant sister, she finds herself blossoming in response to the national obsession with propriety. Under its regime, it is imperative to wear high heels and to offer guests cubed sugar but is perhaps not O.K. to sleep with your French in-laws. Initially, it may seem improbable that such distinctions do not dwindle in importance when suicide, murder, and a gang of art thieves invade the expatriate community, but Isabel's combination of astuteness and idiocy makes this unlikely mélange both witty and compelling.

The Emigrants, by W. G. Sebald (New Directions; $22.95). The author reconstructs the lives of four reticent men of Jewish heritage—a painter, a lapsed country doctor, an elementary-school teacher, and an eloquent great-uncle the author met only once—who left their enclaves in Europe for other shores. Sifting through journals and old photographs (which appear in the book), retracing the men's itineraries, and talking to people he meets along the way, Sebald so discreetly evokes their unapologetic loneliness that their deaths—two by suicide and two by willful neglect—seem of a piece with their polite and thoughtful lives. As in the work of Primo Levi, the dimensions of tragedy are implied, and simple details—the floor plan of a schoolroom, a 1939 ski trip, a Monte Carlo postcard—become monumental.

Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now, edited by Robert Gottlieb (Pantheon; $37.50). You might not think of Jean-Paul Sartre, Murray Kempton, and Lillian Ross as jazz writers, but here they coexist happily alongside Sidney Bechet, Charles Mingus, Ralph J. Gleason, and Stanley Crouch. Gottlieb's invaluable book is intended as "an advertisement for an entire literature," highlighting some of the smartest, most purely illuminating, and pleasurable writing on jazz since it first caught the public ear. By combining familiar sources with previously uncollected gems—like a 1950 "blindfold test" of records evaluated by Billie Holiday—"Reading Jazz" manages to appeal to devotees and initiates alike.

John Marshall: Definer of a Nation, by Jean Edward Smith (Holt; $35). Virginian, Federalist, disciple (and biographer) of George Washington, John Marshall (1755-1835) entrenched the foundations of our national government through his decisions as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and, through his canny navigation of the political currents of Jeffersonian America, affirmed the independence of the federal judiciary. Some of the best moments of this compendious biography treat Marshall's earlier career as soldier and diplomat—particularly his skillful handling of Talleyrand, the serpentine French Foreign Minister, and the notorious agents X, Y, and Z.

MUSICAL EVENTS

BEAUTIFUL NIGHTMARE

After seventy years, Berg's "Wozzeck" is still a shocker.

BY ALEX ROSS

IN the first scene of Alban Berg's "Wozzeck," a soldier is shaving the face of his captain. The music, too, scrapes like a razor, deliberately abrasive to the ear: blunt, dissonant chords; prickly fragments of themes; edgy orchestration. Scattered groups of instruments quickly gather together to make a rude, murderous gesture, embodying the instincts at work within and around the degraded mind of the soldier Wozzeck. But the harsh tone does not last: other voices come to the fore. Early in this same scene, the horns are caught in dreaming, romantic chords; soon afterward, solo strings venture a few plaintive phrases. Sounds of beauty and terror skirmish throughout the opera, fighting over Wozzeck's blank soul. Terror triumphs, but not without a last, unforgettable protest from the other side—the music's spirit of sympathy and ardor.

The intermittent beauties in "Wozzeck" come from the heart: they reflect the peculiarly angelic personality of its composer. Raised amid the decadence of fin-de-siècle Vienna, Berg somehow emerged as a gentle, selfless man who often lost himself in adoration of others. He adored his teacher Schoenberg and wasted a great deal of time executing his martinetlike commands. He adored his wife, Helene—"my most glorious Symphony in D Minor." He adored other women: few could resist his Hugh Grant-on-the-Danube charm. It seems improbable that this graceful character could have created something as emotionally overpowering as "Wozzeck," which once again left audiences dumbstruck when it played at the Metropolitan Opera in February. But Berg's ardor extended to the audience: he knew how to conquer hearts.

Admittedly, the idea of beauty in "Wozzeck" will come as a surprise to some. I went to see two of the five Met performances; both times, patrons rose from their seats and unhappily groped their way out. (The production's sinister lighting made them a procession of Expressionist zombies.) Although Berg's opera has been around for more than seventy years and has become familiar through hundreds of productions, it can still deliver a shock. The score is an encyclopedia of devices of musical fright: for example, the accelerating two-note stomp, which John Williams made famous in his score for "Jaws," and the crescendo on a single tone, which showed up on Trent Reznor's soundtrack to "Natural Born Killers." In the quiet of his Vienna study, Berg plotted episodes of mayhem that contemporary guitar terrorists will not surpass.

The opera embraces chaos, but every detail is ruthlessly controlled. The fragmentary structure of Georg Büchner's 1837 play—in which the soldier Woyzeck is driven by callous superiors, an evil doctor, and systemic malignity to murder his lover, Marie—gave Berg the blueprint for an architecture of musical forms: the opera's fifteen scenes correspond to passacaglias, fugues, sonata forms, symphonic movements, Baroque suites, and so forth. The score is a labyrinth of quotations, parodies, and inside jokes; it contains symmetries of harmony and rhythm which musicologists are still laboring to unravel. At one point, the tendency toward cerebralism is itself mocked; the doctor serenades his demented theories over a twelve-note ground. As Joyce said of his "Ulysses"—another modernist masterwork that begins with a morning shave—"Wozzeck" will keep the professors busy for centuries.

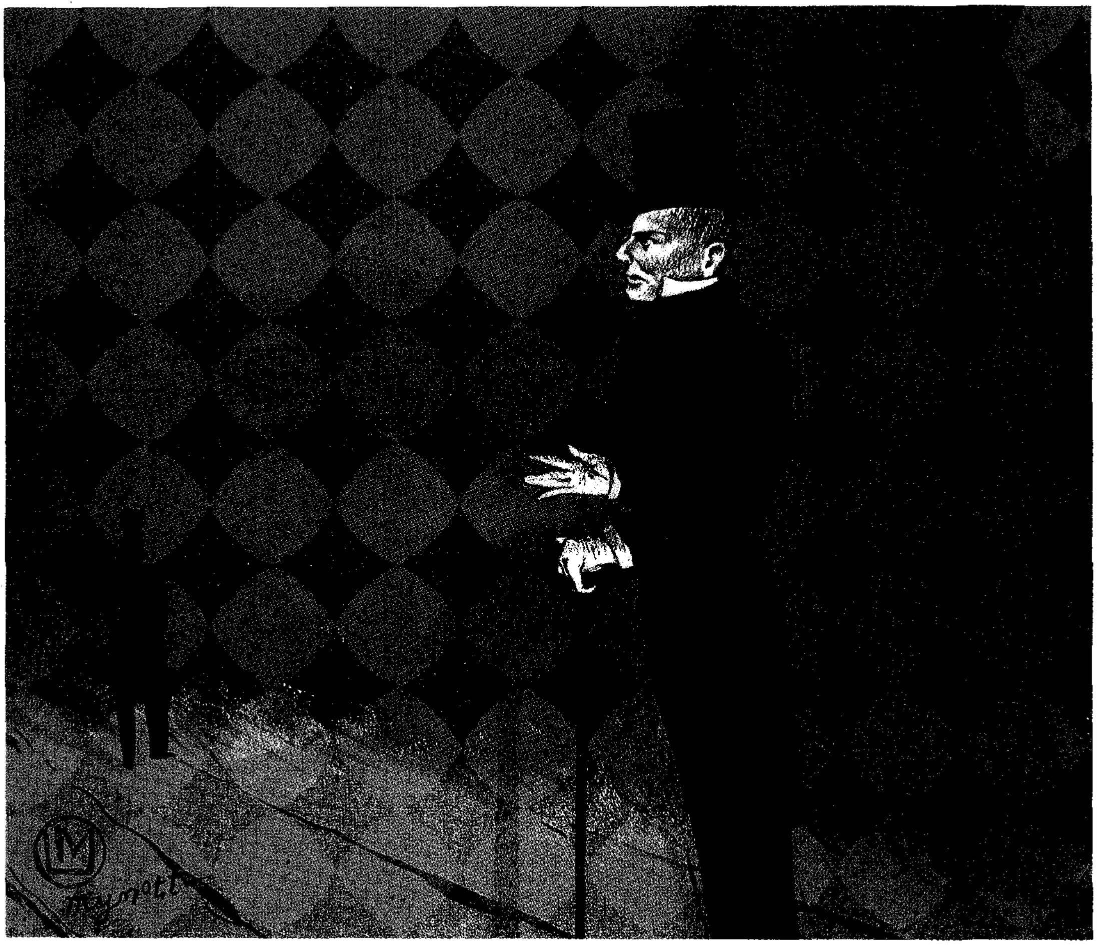
All this complexity does not simply give intellectual pleasure; in a roundabout way, it makes possible the lyrical effusions that win over those with the patience to listen. Scholarly studies by George Perle and, more recently, by Dave Headlam have demonstrated how Berg's individual musical language—in particular, his use of "interval cycles" (whole tones, fourths, fifths, and so on)—allowed him to reconstruct older styles on a Schoenbergian grid. Headlam, in his new study, "The Music of Alban Berg," says the tonal passages are "largely illusions." If so, they are the most powerful kind of illusion: they serve as signposts in unfamiliar terrain and become gateways to a crowd of musical memories.

The sense of the difficulty of "Wozzeck" might finally dissipate if listeners recognized more of Berg's citations of past operatic repertory. For example, the first scene of Act III, in which Marie reads aloud from the Bible, is a haunting reminiscence of Desdemona's Ave Maria in Verdi's "Otello." Puccini, too, comes to mind on a few occasions: the loping melody that represents Wozzeck's anguish has a Puccini-like tread. We should also acknowledge—at the risk of a breach of modernist etiquette—the opera's enormous debt to the premodern sound of Richard Strauss. There are creative thefts from Strauss's "Salome" everywhere: staggered rhythms in the brass, high squeaks on the double bass, an eerie chord linking moonlight with death, explosive chromatic patterns on the timpani, the pervasive use of a modified whole-tone scale. "Salome" and "Wozzeck" speak much the same language; it seems perverse that some operagoers should like one and not the other.

Just before the ghastly final scene—in which children rush off to see the body of Marie—Berg has the orchestra deliver a eulogy that brings to the surface all the secret tonal longing of the score. The principal theme, a swooping string aria in pure Romantic D minor, originated in a piano piece that Berg wrote for his wife and included in the opera at her request. Berg called this passage "a confession of the author who now steps outside the dramatic action on the stage." What is confessed is the power of simplicity. Just as Joyce has the courage to write plain words at the end of Leopold Bloom's journey—"He rests. He has travelled"—Berg lays his protagonist to rest with music of shocking sweetness.

Last month's new "Wozzeck" was one of the more successful of the Met's recent attempts to investigate post-Puccini repertory. ("Building a bridge to the twentieth century" might be the house motto.) The team of the producer Mark Lamos, the set designer Robert Israel, and the lighting designer James Ingalls opted for a bleak East German look: huge gray walls with structural supports; minimal furnishing; deep swaths of blue and red. The most striking image was the red moon rising over Wozzeck's crime: its mottled surface had the look of a blown-up blood cell. The stage action around these images was sometimes stiff and unimaginative; many precise correspondences between Büchner's drama and Berg's music disappeared in the shadow of Lamos's obvious symbolism. But the production over all had the virtues of coherence and consistency.

The German baritone Falk Struckmann made a notable Met début in the lead. His forceful, on-target, sensitively shaded voice was a good match for James Levine's hyperaccurate conducting. I was left wondering what drove this unusually human Wozzeck over the edge, but perhaps the music answers that question sufficiently. Michael Devlin and Graham Clark delivered vibrant portraits of the Doctor and the Captain, Wozzeck's chief tormentors: the one a tall, skeletonic sadist with a peculiarly brilliant, cutting bass voice; the other a short, stuffy bureaucrat who managed to sound a perfect note of bourgeois contentment when he surveyed the scene of Wozzeck's drowning and pronounced it "uncanny."


In the most visually arresting moment of the Met's "Wozzeck," the sadistic Doctor enters the blood-red murder scene.

The one unfortunate casting was Maria Ewing as Marie. She is an accomplished actress who effectively conveyed Marie as an innocent, sensual woman caught in the headlights of Wozzeck's madness. But a lot of the music wasn't there: I followed the score at home during the radio broadcast, and found her singing several high notes quite at random. Moreover, her phrasing lacked rhythmic clarity and her enunciation was bizarre. It is a pity that the Met did not give the role to Waltraud Meier, who was widely lambasted for last fall's "Carmen" but who might have done much better as Marie. (She sings the role strongly on a new Teldec recording.)

The whole endeavor turned unambiguously splendid in the hands of James Levine. It must have been among the conductor's finest hours at the Met. Hard-core atonalists may complain that he cushioned Berg's shocks, seeking ultimate beauty of sound; I don't regret the trade-off, since ultimate beauty did arrive. The D-minor interlude was an endless Romantic surge; even more poignant were the solitary voices that floated out of the orchestra—violin, cello, trumpet, and horn, among others. The solo players offered consolation in a cruel orchestral world. Alban Berg was a modest man who composed like God: he gave and he took away, his cruelty making sympathy more precious. ♦

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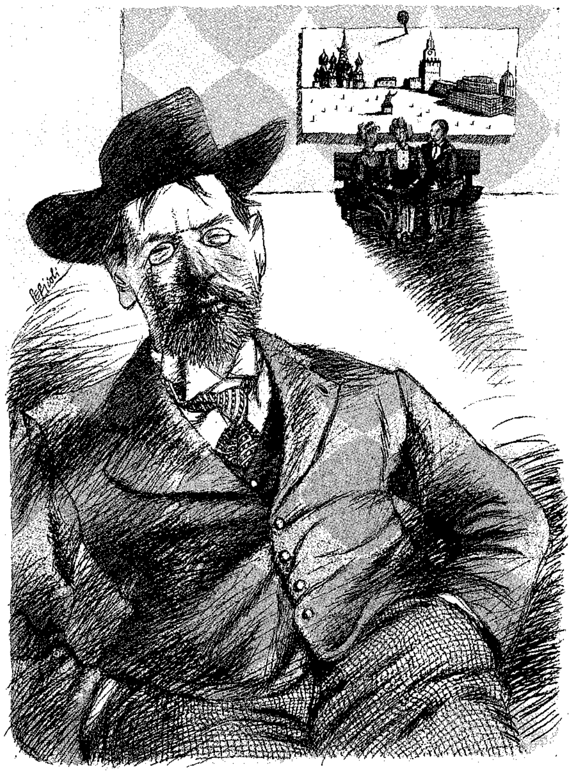
THE THEATRE

STARS OVER RUSSIA

Three bored sisters, and one bumptious artist.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

IN Scott Elliott's production of "Three Sisters," at the Roundabout, the stage seems populated not so much by Chekhov's characters as by Chekhov types—the bored, the buffoonish, the boorish, the bogus. Not much happens in "Three Sisters": the main action could be said to be the persistence of the sisters' desire to return to Moscow after eleven years in the dull provincial town where their late father was the commander of an Army brigade. There is a terrible fire, and there is a fateful duel, but the plot is really going on inside the characters, where passive hope and active frustration simultaneously nourish and eat away at them. On the page, "Three Sisters" is almost as tedious as the sisters' lives; it's a play that, even more than most, needs to be given life to be affecting. Elliott has gathered a dozen big and biggish names for this purpose, and it is as if he got lost in the stars; for the audience, this translates into an experience of watching actors act instead of seeing how people live.



Passive hope and active frustration: Chekhov's plot is really going on inside the characters.

Harold Clurman wrote that he rarely saw a Chekhov play without crying; what always moved him about "Three Sisters," he said, was the essential goodness of the people. This nonlachrygenic production leaves one to contemplate only the comparative goodness of the performances. Amy Irving's portrayal of Olga, the oldest sister, loses its initial stiffness and deepens as the evening goes on; Lili Taylor, as Irina, the youngest and dreamiest, stares into the middle distance a lot; and Jeanne Tripplehorn, as Masha, the most vocally miserable of the trio, behaves like a spoiled, impatient yuppie whose weekend in the Hamptons has been ruined by bad weather. Her manner is so anachronistically snippy that you almost expect her to whip out a cell phone and bark "Get me Moscow, and make it snappy!" As the gadfly Solyony, Billy Crudup is a charged particle of trouble, but the richest performance is David Strathairn's as Vershinin, the Army officer who falls in love with Masha. Vershinin, who's saddled with a crazy wife, is both sad and hopeful, and Strathairn is able to combine these notes into a resonant, if muffled, chord of humanity.

It's been a big year for the thirty-four-year-old Elliott, who also directed the controversial Broadway production of "Present Laughter," starring Frank Langella (many theatregoers grumbled over a scene that included inappropriate, un-Cowardly frontal and caudal nudity), but it hasn't been a great year. Still, anyone who saw his last two, masterly Off Broadway productions—Mike Leigh's "Ecstasy" and Stephen Bill's "Curtains," both of them sharp, vinegary contemporary British plays—will be eager to see what he does next.

THE first show at Circle in the Square under its new producing director, Gregory Mosher, is a triumphant mounting of the Royal National Theatre's production of Pam Gems's "Stanley," about the British artist Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). And how fitting it is that Circle's rebirth occurs with this portrait of a man who approached every minute of his existence as if he had been born just the minute before. He painted out of a kind of religious awe for life and its fleshly manifestations, and with tremendous energy and emotion. But he wasn't nearly as much in love with the world as he was in love with his responses to the world. The psychodynamics between Spencer (brilliantly portrayed by Antony Sher, who also happens to be a painter) and his wife, Hilda (Deborah Findlay), are clear from the outset. In the opening moments, when Spencer, a funny-looking little man, who wears baggy, worn-out corduroys and odd glasses, is getting ready to paint her, she spoon-feeds him before taking off her robe to pose for him. "Stanley" could be subtitled "Portrait of the Artist as a Big Baby."

One of the most impressive aspects of this production is the way the director, John Caird, and his set designer, Tim Hatley, have used the space in the theatre. Behind the last rows are large reproductions of Spencer's paintings, and against one wall is a huge mural-in-progress, with scaffolding in front of it. The people in the front row sit behind a wooden railing that evokes a church pew—and, come to think of it, a jury box. It's a cathedral of art (complete with occasional blasts of choral music), and while you're in it you're compelled not just to judge but also to forgive.

The setting immediately draws you in, but the play itself gets off to an awkward start as it attempts to establish Stanley's principles. Hilda says that painting is "about looking, what else is there?" and Stanley explodes with a disquisition on the Meaning of Life: "What is it that sets out the identity of everything we know . . . rips away meaninglessness? Love . . . passion. That's what we're here for. . . . That's our job. To reveal the nature of the world. Through love." And you think, Oh, dear. And you think it again in the next scene—a party that includes Augustus John and Spencer's dealer—when there's an argument about the relative merits of realism and the avant-garde. Stanley says that the avant-garde artists have a "fatal and suicidal talent for adaptability . . . most of all to being less than human," and his dealer, solemnly swirling his drink, says gravely, "Human? I think that got washed out at Flanders . . . on the Somme."

It's when Stanley's childish and self-serving behavior starts to have consequences that the play really begins—and, in a way, that's when it ends. At the London party, he meets Patricia Preece (Anna Chancellor), a lesbian and a painter who soon decides that marrying Spencer is her ticket to success. (Needless to say, this idea does not sit well with her lover, Dorothy Hepworth—who is wonderfully played by Selina Cadell—even though Patricia has no intention of letting Stanley touch her.) Stanley becomes obsessed with Patricia and her beauty, and from then on there's a lot of running back and forth across the stage as Stanley tries to make Hilda understand why he wants to marry Patricia and tries to make Patricia love him. (The kicker is that Stanley feels that Hilda, who refuses to be his mistress after he marries Patricia, abandoned *him.*) At one point, Sher, to show Stanley's boundless drive toward gratification, climbs up to the rafters of the theatre, runs along a catwalk, and clambers down a ladder—all just to gaze at the indifferent object of his lust through her window.

Sher's performance is emotionally agile as well. While you don't sympathize with Stanley's behavior to his wife or to his unseen daughters, who seem not to exist for him except as competition for Hilda's attention, you accept his feelings as real—he's as much at their mercy as everyone else is. Ridiculous (and destructive) as he is, you can't help thinking that he's on to something vital and important. When Stanley rhapsodizes about his boyhood in the rural hamlet of Cookham and talks about "the feel of everything . . . wet ivy by the door, cold lino, the iron latch on the privy in winter," and the smells of wet dog and barley soup, it gets to you in a visceral way, and convinces you that, like it or not, genius does have something to do with never fully growing up. ♦

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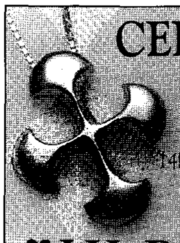

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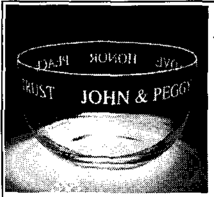

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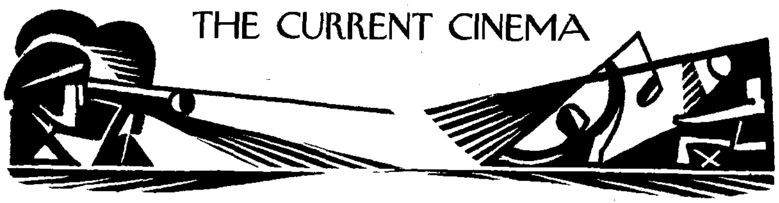


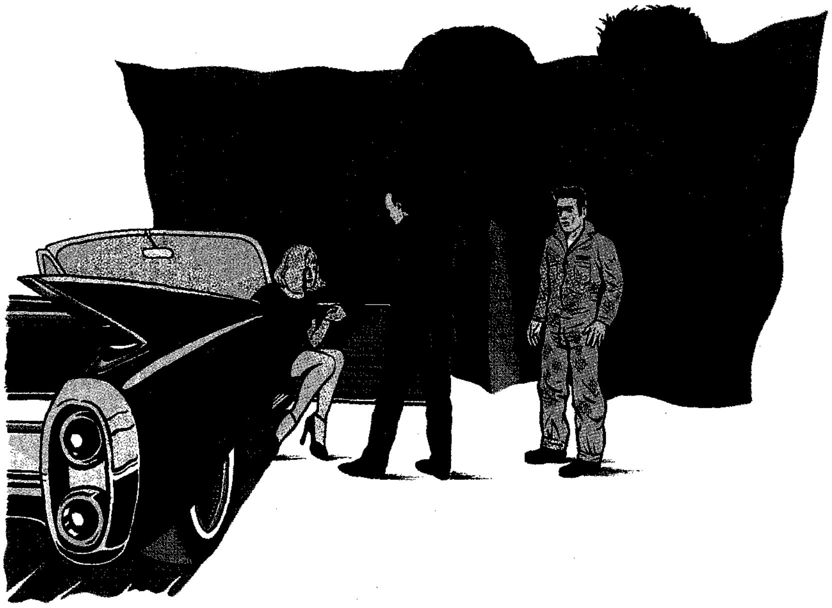
THE CURRENT CINEMA

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

A cosmic film noir, and an icy murder mystery.

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

DAVID LYNCH'S "Lost Highway" is, like his nightmare classic "Blue Velvet" (1986), a dark, lurid, and enigmatic thriller. It's sure to generate plenty of debate about both its complex formal strategies and its tricky metaphysics. And that, in a way, is what makes "Lost Highway" less potent than the earlier movie: this time, Lynch has given us something to talk about rather than something to dream about. The screenplay—an original, by Lynch and Barry Gifford—decorates the characteristic sexual paranoia and ambient fatalism of film noir with touches of the fantastic, which seem intended to turn the genre's worn material inside out. The movie is absorbing and often brilliant, but even its most alarming images are surprisingly easy to shake off. "Lost Highway," for all its violent beauties, isn't conceived in the surrealist spirit of transgression, as "Blue Velvet" was; it is, finally, no more than an unusually vigorous exercise in deconstruction.



No exit: Patricia Arquette, Robert Loggia, and Balthazar Getty in "Lost Highway."

The hero, a journeyman sax player named Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), is an instantly recognizable noir type: a slightly depressed-looking regular guy, who appears to know that he was born under a bad sign. He suspects his bombshell wife, Renee (Patricia Arquette), of cheating on him; she's anxious and secretive, so it isn't hard for him (or the viewer) to believe that she's involved in unsavory activities. And, for some reason, they're under surveillance: videotapes, first of the outside of their house and then of the inside, have been turning up, in unmarked manila envelopes, on their doorstep. All this slow-building dread culminates, naturally, in a murder, which Fred may or may not have committed—he isn't sure himself. The evidence, in any case, points to him; he's speedily arrested, tried, and convicted. While the luckless protagonist is in prison, Lynch and Gifford contrive a kind of kamikaze narrative tactic to bust him out and give him the second chance that noir heroes almost never get. In a scene that suggests a more frenetic version of an "X-Files" alien abduction, Fred simply disappears from his cell and is replaced by a very puzzled young man, who, after a brief investigation, is identified as Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) and released. "Lost Highway" thereby allows itself a fresh start; it's as if Lynch (who played an F.B.I. bureau chief in his "Twin Peaks") had enrolled his hero in the narrative equivalent of a witness-protection program—relocating him and giving him a new identity, in return for services rendered.

Daring as this gambit appears to be, it proves a false reprieve: it's an illusion, like the apparently miraculous escape of the condemned man in the famous Ambrose Bierce story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." In film noir, there's really no exit for dazed nocturnal wanderers like Fred Madison and Pete Dayton, no imaginative leap great enough to spring them from their common, generic identity—the cell they share. "Lost Highway" takes one character to the end of the line and then just makes a small hop to the side and sets another character on an exactly parallel line. When Pete begins an affair with Alice Wakefield, a thug's mistress who is a blond replica of the brunette Renee—and who is also played by Patricia Arquette—we see where this highway is headed: toward the vanishing point, where the story lines will converge.

Hovering, godlike, over the strange events of "Lost Highway" is a sinister character who is identified in the credits only as the Mystery Man (Robert Blake). He pops in and out of both Fred's story and Pete's, the sole character in the picture whose movements aren't limited by fate or by genre: he keeps people unnerved with his ability to be in two places at once. (For a party trick, he asks Fred, who is standing in front of him, to call him on the phone; he answers.) As Blake plays him, with piercing eyes and slicked-down black hair and an ominously deadened voice, the Mystery Man has a creepy, truly unwholesome aura; he looks like the monstrous spawn of Howard Cosell and the dancing dwarf of "Twin Peaks." But there's no mystery about what he's doing in this movie. As he guides the characters toward the fulfillment of their various destinies (that is, either to dispense or to receive retribution), we recognize him as an old-fashioned, reassuringly familiar literary conceit—the artist-manipulator, who functions as the storyteller's acknowledgment of his own power over his creation. This self-reflexiveness isn't out of place in the movie, whose apparently capricious narrative manner betrays the confidence (or arrogance) of absolute control, but it undermines the pure unreason that is David Lynch's greatest strength. For all the gore and sordid sex and frenzied vengeance in "Lost Highway," the picture feels unnaturally cool, tidy, and hermetic, like a "Tales from the Crypt" horror comic written by Robbe-Grillet.

The difficulty with fancy, elegant deconstructions like "Lost Highway" is that they're helplessly reductive. The supernatural elements that Lynch and Gifford inject into their otherwise conventional film noir result not in expanding the possibilities of the genre but in narrowing them. What this picture's dislocated narrative implies, ultimately, is that everyone's story is the same; here the serviceable conventions of noir turn into inarguable axioms, and its seductive mood of midnight cynicism hardens into an eternal verity. You couldn't get off this highway if you tried. Lynch, who's not much of a philosopher, may not realize that this is what his movie is saying, but every now and then his editing rhythm seems to go haywire and his characters start to scream and flail, and the thrash-metal nihilism of those moments (the picture ends with one of them) suggests that he may feel a bit confined in these tight quarters—that he's climbing the walls of his cell. The technical mastery of "Lost Highway" is heartening. After several years of sporadic and unsatisfying work, David Lynch has returned to form; his return to substance may take a little longer.

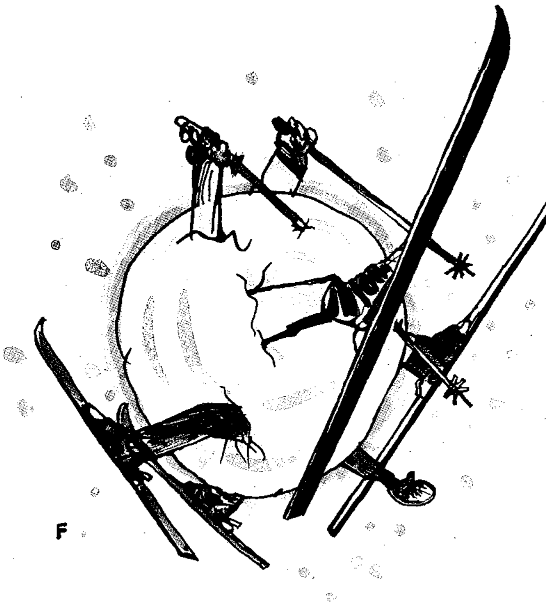
THE movie version of Peter Hoeg's 1993 best-seller, "Smilla's Sense of Snow," has its own sort of identity crisis: it's a ghost story that thinks it's a murder mystery. The film, which was directed by Bille August, opens with a striking sequence set on a vast expanse of ice in Greenland: in this unearthly landscape, a solitary hunter and his sled dogs are suddenly disturbed by a huge explosion, and they desperately try to outrun the towering waves of water created by the inexplicable cataclysm. The audience, like the unfortunate hunter, doesn't quite know what hit it, and while we're still attempting to make sense of the bizarre spectacle we've just witnessed, August cuts to present-day Copenhagen and plunges swiftly into the mystery that will generate the rest of the movie's action. A six-year-old boy—an Inuit, from Greenland—is found dead on the sidewalk, having apparently fallen from the roof of his apartment building. It looks like an accidental death, but one of the boy's neighbors, Smilla Jaspersen (Julia Ormond), who is herself half Inuit, thinks otherwise. She knows that he was afraid of heights, and when she inspects his footprints in the snow on the roof she sees that he wasn't playing up there; he was running, in heedless panic, from someone or something. There are no other footprints on the roof.

That's a terrific setup for a tale of the supernatural: imagine, say, an ancient Inuit spirit roaming freely through the modern city, seeking out displaced Greenlanders and, for unfathomable reasons of its own, hounding them to their deaths. And for a while—even as Smilla is charging around Copenhagen like Nancy Drew, interviewing medical examiners and stealing secret documents—the movie plays as that sort of story, because August and his superb cinematographer, Jörgen Persson, lay on a wonderfully eerie, winter-light mood: chilly, hushed, uneasy. Ormond, who was badly miscast in the recent remake of "Sabrina," is effective here: her solemn, deliberate manner and her rather remote beauty seem perfectly natural in the spectral Copenhagen of "Smilla's Sense of Snow." But the movie's spell begins to dissipate about halfway through, when the plot machinery required to resolve the mystery by non-supernatural means starts clanking so loudly that it can't be ignored. The screenplay, by Ann Biderman, follows the novel faithfully, taking the heroine to Greenland, where Smilla finds her true self and the story loses itself: the fine suggestiveness of the movie's beginning collapses, like thin ice, under the weight of dumb shoot-outs, evil scientists, and breathless escapes. The clumsy detective-thriller additions ruin what might have been a lovely haunted house. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

TEACH YOUR FOUR-YEAR-OLD TO SKI

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY



Set alarm for 4 A.M. in order to begin dressing process of child. (Note: Allow at least a half hour for locating left mitten, which child does not remember having used for toy soldier's sleeping bag the night before.)

Drop child off at resort's Ski Bunny program. Banter cheerfully with staff as you attempt to pry hysterical child from your legs. Affect bemusement over his insistence that he does not *want* to be enrolled in Ski Bunny program. Tell staff that child "actually loves" skiing and is really adorable once he stops screaming. Slip staff twenty-dollar bills for "treats."

Head off with wife, teary over "abandoning" child.

Stand in thirty-minute-long lift line. Attempt to console wife by remarking how impressed you were by the "professionalism" of the Ski Bunny program's staff. Also remark that you had forgotten how cold it sometimes gets in Vermont, and how windy, with today's nippy, gale-force wind blowing down from Baffin Island. Impress her by calculating that the wind-chill factor comes out to thirteen degrees below zero.

As you reach head of lift line, remain calm as public-address-system loudspeaker announces: "Will the parents of [your child's name] please report to the Ski Bunny program immediately."

Arrive to find child physically intact but hyperventilatingly adamant that he will not remain another minute in Ski Bunny program. Despite their "professionalism," staff members eagerly concur.

Agree to wife's proposal that you have "fun bonding" experience by teaching child to ski yourself, as she disappears in search of chemical "warmers" to counteract numbness in extremities.

Fasten harness around child and, using reins, repeatedly pull delighted child a hundred yards up baby slope, until your knees begin to make crunching sound similar to snapping stalks of celery, audible even through thickly insulated ski pants.

Convince wary child that he is "ready" to go with you on ski lift. Emphasize how much "fun" it will be.

Attempt to reassure child as gusts of Canadian air rock ski-lift seat wildly from side to side, a hundred feet above the slopes. Explain, too, that it is "normal" for the ski lift to stop every three minutes for long periods. Tell him that you cannot feel *your* nose, either.

Slowly but surely accept the fact that you have erroneously got on a lift to the summit, thereby committing yourselves to a bonding experience you'll both remember for years and years.

As end of lift approaches, attempt to persuade panicking child that the machinery was not expressly invented for purpose of mangling him.

With dubious child held firmly between your legs, begin snowplowing down several thousand yards of ice covered with a thin dusting of artificial snow. This is Vermont, after all—but think of how much money you saved by not going to one of those expensive places out West!

Try to ignore acute shooting pains in your lumbar region by focussing on interesting new pain on insides of your knees. Remind yourself that with recent advances in arthroscopic surgical technique you'll be walking normally in weeks.

Whoopsie daisy! Apologize to child for falling on top of him. Try to make him laugh by pointing out that tip of his ski is embedded in your left eye.

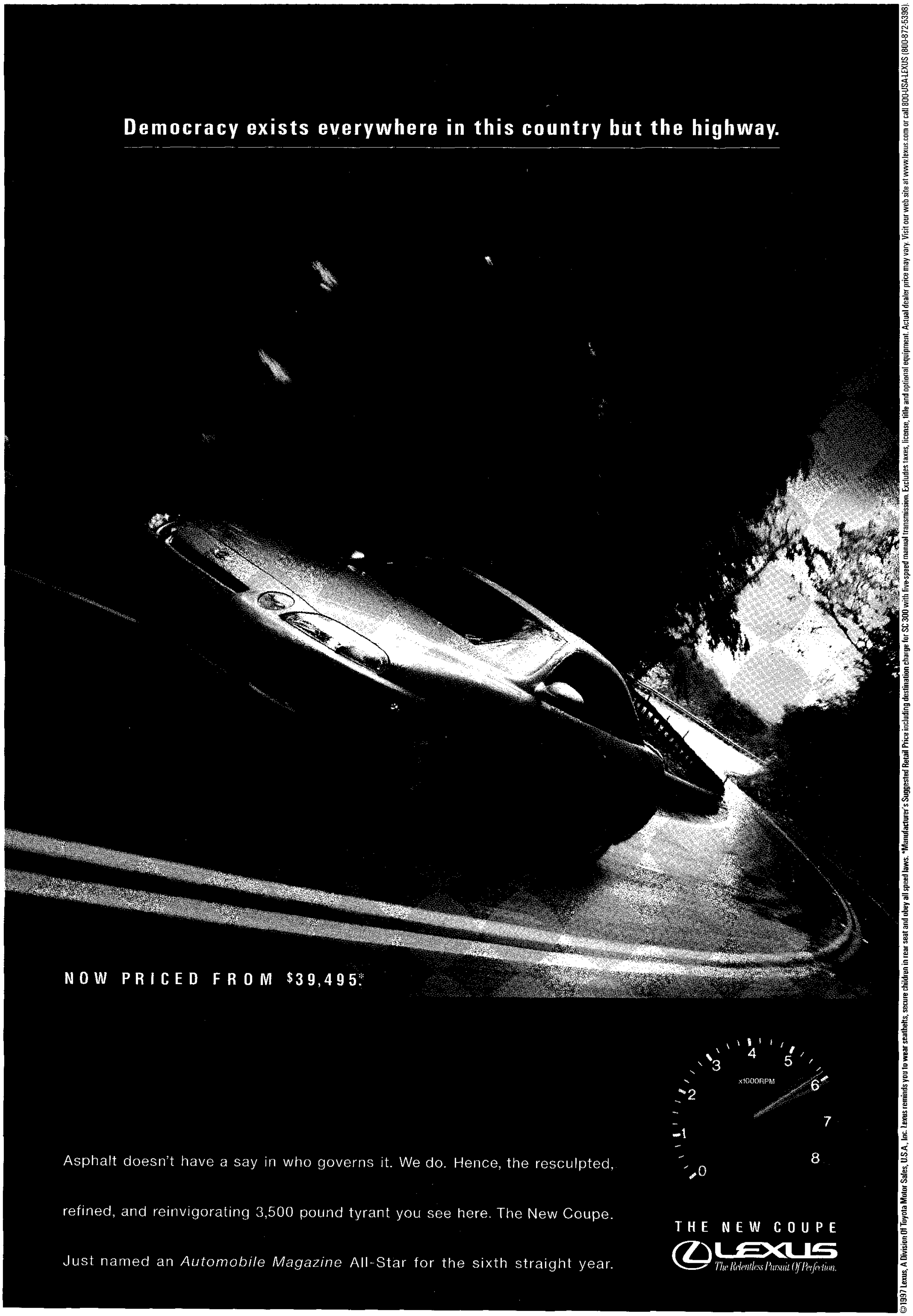
When lumbar pain increases to unignorable level of intensity, tell child you are going to have "even more fun" by hooking yourselves together with the "kiddie harness."

Fall on ice and, spinning like a wildly thrown Argentine bola, cartwheel down the mountain. Reassure child that death is not imminent by shouting "Whee!" and "Isn't this neat!"

Attempt to stop by grabbing on to leg of passing skier. Profusely apologize to skier, who, it turns out, is a successful negligence lawyer from Manhattan.

Continue bola-like descent. At bottom, hand over frozen, traumatized child to furious wife, who, having stuffed her clothing with two hundred dollars' worth of chemical warmers, resembles a scarecrow.

Remain flat on back for duration of scathing lecture on your incompetence as a ski instructor. (Note: wife does not care that you have no feeling in your legs.) ♦



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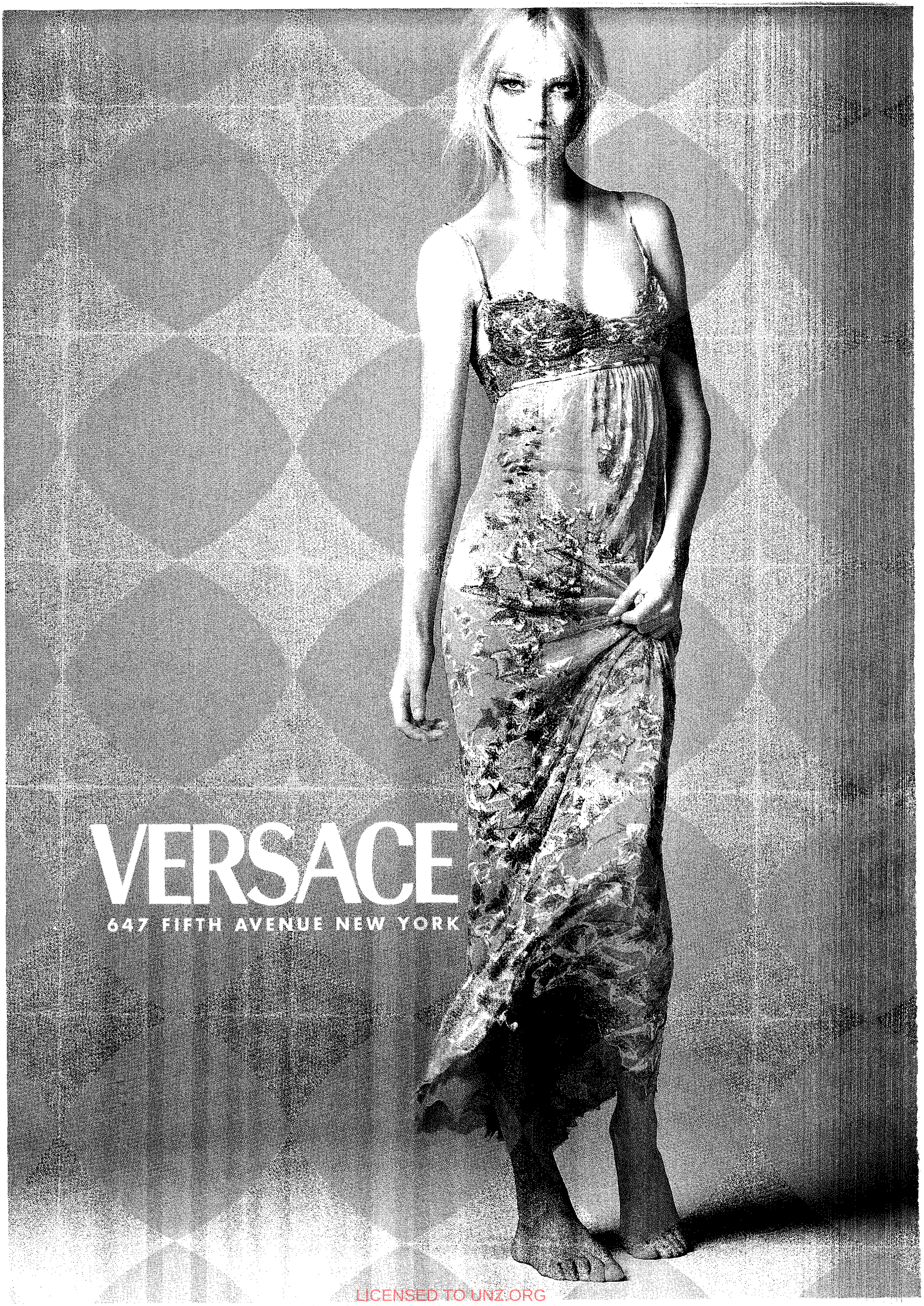
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